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SERMONS

BY

JOHN CONYBEARE, D.D.

LATE

LORD BISHOP of BRISTOL,



Dean of Christ-Church, Oxon.

3 Ld

VOL. II.

LONDON:

Printed by SAMUEL RICHARDSON.

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26

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MDCCLXXII.

S E R M O N I.

The Aggravations of Sin under the
Gospel.

HEBREWS X. 29.

*Of how much forer Punishment, suppose ye,
shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden
under Foot the Son of God; and hath counted
the Blood of the Covenant wherewith he was
sanctified, an unholy Thing; and hath done
Despite unto the Spirit of Grace?*

THE Words now read refer to the
Case of Apostacy from the Profession
of the Christian Faith: A Crime to
which Christians, in the more early Ages,
were particularly exposed from the unhappy
Circumstances of the Times.

VOL. II.

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It

It is not to be wondered that Persons just converted to the Christian Faith, however affected by its general Evidence, should yet be imperfectly acquainted either with the Doctrines which it taught, or the Privileges which it bestowed, or the Duties which it imposed; and therefore liable to be seduced by *the cunning Craftiness of those who lay in wait to deceive.*

As little is it to be wondered that Persons, not yet established in the Faith, by the full Possession of those Principles which that Faith proposes, should be open to the Influences of Terror,---and driven, by the heavy Persecutions which were raised against them, from that Profession they had formerly embraced.

And, accordingly, this proved the Case, that, whilst some were seduced by the Craftiness of false Teachers,---others were terrified by the Apprehension of those Miseries they reckoned themselves unable to bear.

In this infant and weak State of the Church our Apostle comes in to their Assistance; and in the Epistle (of which my Text is a Part) he addresses them with Two Kinds of Arguments.

The First is drawn from the supreme Excellency

S E R M O N I. 3

cellency of their Faith,---or of that Religion to which their Faith led them; and the Other, from the great Guilt and Danger of deserting it.

This Latter (which is the Point before me) is thus expressed by the Apostle; *He that despised Moses his Law died without Mercy under Two or Three Witnesses. Of how much sorer Punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under Foot the Son of God; and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant with which he was sanctified, an unholy Thing; and hath done Despite unto the Spirit of Grace?*

These Words (as hath been noted already) do, in their primary Intention, refer to the Case of Apostacy from the Profession of the Christian Faith; but, in their Consequences, will carry us much farther: For, can we think that a bare Profession of Faith will be sufficient? May we not deny God as well by our Actions, as in our Profession? And will not this Profession itself, if not answered by a suitable Practice, be an Argument of Guilt? If this be so, we may apply these Words, not unsuitably to our Apostle's Intention, to the Case of Sinners within the Pale of the Church, and consider them as representing the great Aggravations of Sin under the Gospel Dispensation.

This Argument shall be distinctly prosecuted under the following Particulars ;

- I. A sinful Life, under the Profession of the Gospel Faith, is an Insult on the express and direct Authority of God himself: It is *a treading under Foot the Son of God.*
- II. It is a Renunciation of all the Benefits purchased for us by the Sufferings and Death of Christ ; as *representing the Blood of the Covenant wherewith we are sanctified, as an unholy Thing.* And,
- III. It implies a wilful and malicious Opposition to the Blessed Spirit, who hath been offered to us, and is ready to co-operate with us in the Discharge of our several Duties: *We hereby do Despise unto the Spirit of Grace.*

I. In reference to my First Head, it may be noted, that all Sin whatsoever, whether committed under the Light of Nature, or the Instructions of Revelation, is an Opposition to Divine Authority. This must arise from the very Nature of the Thing: For, though Reasons and Fitnesses may be the Ground of Law, yet they cannot, of themselves, constitute it. This must ever carry with it the Notion of a Superior, who hath a Right and Power to command us ; which Right must
be

S E R M O N I. 5

be ultimately Divine, ---- and which Power can possibly be exercised in its full Extent by no one but God himself.

We may see from hence that the very *Gentiles* themselves, as being subject to Sin, were so likewise to a Law; and, tho' without a written one delivered by Persons divinely commissioned, were yet (as the Apostle expresses it) *a Law unto themselves*.

This however is observable, that this Law of Nature, being discoverable only by natural Light, must be imperfectly known by the Generality of Mankind; narrow, as to them, in its Principles, ---- defective as to its Motives, ---- and weakly enforced by the Sanctions which should support it: On these Accounts great Allowances must be made for the Conduct of Mankind under it; for, where little hath been given, much, I conceive, will not be required. Offences therefore, under such Circumstances, must have been vastly different from what we ought to esteem them under greater Light, and more powerful Inducements: And agreeably our Apostle hath, on another Occasion, declared, that *the Times of this Ignorance God winked at* [*Acts xvii. 30.*].

To supply, in some measure, these De-

6 S E R M O N I.

fects, God was pleased to instruct and to assist Men by his Prophets ; Persons extraordinarily appointed, in several Ages, to support the Cause of Religion, not only by foretelling a better Condition of Things to come, but by present Directions, as to their Conduct, enforced on them as the express Will of God. These had their Effect in proportion to the Capacities and Dispositions of the Hearers ; and where they failed, were, doubtless, a great Aggravation of their Guilt.

The Law afterward delivered by *Moses* contributed still more highly to this End : For, in this greater Measures of Light were afforded : The Rules even of *moral* Duty were more distinctly treated in the Ten Commandments, than they had ever been before : Methods were used, in a particular Kind of Discipline, to support the Worship of the true God, and to exclude the Worship of false ones : And all these were farther enforced by the Preaching of Persons supernaturally instructed, succeeding one another through a great Length of Time, till the Captivity of the *Jews* ; which very Captivity was brought on them by their sinning under all these religious Advantages : For, *when God looked, that the Vineyard he had thus cultivated*

S E R M O N I. 7

vated should bring forth Grapes; lo! it brought forth wild Grapes [Isai. v. 2.].

This leads me to that great Dispensation I am principally concerned to speak of; I mean, the Revelation made to us by Jesus Christ: For God, *who at sundry Times, and in divers Manners, spake in Time past to the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last Days spoken unto us by his Son [Hebr. i. 1, 2.].*

This eminently Divine Teacher was the Person designed by God to recover Man,--- by rendering the State of Religion (which had been gradually improving under former Instructions) at length perfect; --- by teaching us distinctly what our Duty is in every respect, and, of course, how grossly we have failed in performing it; --- by representing to us the Supreme Being in the most adorable Light, --- his Power as irresistible, --- his Wisdom as unsearchable, --- his Justice as inflexible, --- and his Goodness as inexhaustible; --- by discovering the Relations which God bears to us, whether by Nature or by Will; whether they concern the Divine Being absolutely, or the respective Persons in that One undivided Nature; --- by requiring from us the utmost we can do towards conforming ourselves to his all-perfect Commands, and

yet proclaiming Pardon for our past Offences upon our sincere Repentance ; --- by setting before us the most excellent Pattern of Duty in his own Example ; --- by proposing to us the most effectual Means both for Reformation of Life, and Establishment of Obedience ; --- and, lastly, by enforcing all this on us from the View of Motives singularly affecting. By all this he hath fully answered the Character given of him, *viz.* Of being *that Prophet which should come into the World.*

Beyond all this, it deserves likewise our Attention, that, beside the Excellency and Extent of our Faith, it hath been derived to us, not in the Way which had been used in former Times, by the Teaching of Men divinely commissioned, or even the Disposition of Angels, but by the Authority of the only begotten Son of God ; --- of One equal in Dignity, as being of the same Nature with the Father himself ; --- of a Person whom *the Angels of God worship, and by whom also God made the Worlds.* In this View, the Scheme proposed comes enforced on us in a very particular manner. We are now directly *taught of God.* His Condescension in doing this, is amazing : And, since the Authority which doth it, is supreme and original, one might
hope

S E R M O N I. 9

hope the Effects of it likewise would be universal. But should it prove otherwise, judge what must be the Consequence of our Disobedience : For we are not only acting against full Light, our own Consciences (if we consult them) reproaching us, but we set ourselves at open Defiance with God himself. When he commands, ---- in Person commands, and we will not obey, must we not expect, that *God will arise and maintain his own Cause, remembering how the foolish Man blasphemeth him daily?* And when the great Tryal comes, what Excuse can we make? --- what Plea in Abatement can we offer? Our Blessed Saviour himself thus states the Matter ; *If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had Sin* [*i. e.* had not sinned so heinously] ; *but now they have no Cloak for their Sin*; --- no Ignorance, no Suspicion of Authority to alledge : They have sinned with their Eyes open, --- perhaps their own Minds reproving them, and against a Power just ready to overwhelm them.

It will not be improper (and what I have just now said suggests it) to consider our Blessed Lord, the Author of our Faith, under another Character ; *viz.* as the supreme Head and Governor of the Church.

Thus

10 S E R M O N I.

Thus he is considered in the New Testament as erecting a spiritual Empire in Opposition to the Power of Satan, who had seduced Mankind from their Allegiance to that God, to whom they were naturally subject. Of this State, or Combination of Persons thus united, he is declared the Head; and the Persons so combined are his Subjects, his Soldiers, --- Persons concerned to obey his Laws, and to war his Warfare. Agreeably, those to whom he addresses himself are exhorted *to come to him*; those who are converted are said *to be given to him*; he is to guide and to direct them as *the Captain of their Salvation*, --- to protect them from Danger, --- to support them under Difficulties, --- and at length to reward them with Glory,

In Truth, a spiritual Empire of this Kind was not entirely a new Thing begun under the Christian Dispensation, but in some sort the Continuation of a former Empire erected under the *Jewish*: For of them was *Christ* also the King: By Him was the Law delivered to *Moses*; it was He who went before them in the Pillars of Fire and Smoak; it was He who gave them Victory over their Enemies; who spake forth his Oracles; who fixed his Residence between the Cherubim;
and,

S E R M O N I. II

and, in short, who governed the *Hebrews* with supreme Authority.

Upon this Foot, I presume, it is, that when Christ appeared amongst them in an human Form, he is said *to come to His Own*, --- to His Own, not merely as he was the Descendant from *David*, to whom the *Jewish* Crown by Succession belonged, --- but as one greater than he, --- the supreme Governor of their State, whose Vicegerent only *David* himself could be understood to be.

In consequence of this Regal Power over the *Jews*, a Disobedience to the Law was a Rebellion against God ; it was an entire Renunciation of his Authority over them ; and accordingly punished, as other wilful rebellions are wont to be, by absolute Destruction: *He*, saith the Apostle, *who despised Moses his Law, died without Mercy under Two or Three Witnesses.*

Let us carry this on to a similar Power under the Christian State ; or rather let us consider it as the same Power either revived or continued. In this View of the Matter, what ought to be our Behaviour, --- and what our Apprehension, in case of Disobedience ? Our Submission itself should be absolute ; for the Authority to which we are subject is unlimited ;

12 S E R M O N I.

limited; and every wilful and habitual Offence against it, is a Resistance of this Authority; in which, if we persevere, and continue unrepentant to the End, and thereby *trample under Foot the Son of God*, in both his Prophetical and Regal Characters, *what must remain but a fearful Looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries [Heb. x. 27.]? What a fearful Thing must it be to fall into the Hands of a living and provoked God! ver. 31.*

II. I pass on now to the Second Particular from whence the Aggravation of Sin under the Gospel arises; *viz.* It is a Renunciation of all the Benefits purchased for us by the Sufferings and Death of Christ; as representing *the Blood of the Covenant wherewith we are sanctified, as an unholy Thing.*

Under the former Head I have considered our Blessed Lord both in his *prophetical* and *regal* Characters; --- in the One, as our Supreme Teacher; in the Other, as our Supreme Governor. I shall now take a Step farther, and consider him likewise as our High-Priest, offering for us a Sacrifice of Atonement, which none but he could offer, ---the most valuable Sacrifice of Himself; ---as confirming the new Covenant of Pardon
he

S E R M O N I. 13

he made for us with his own Blood; --- and, in virtue of this, *sanctifying*; i. e. making us holy, --- at least recommending us as such to the all-holy Father.

Every Sin committed by us, is an Offence against God, from whom we derived our Being, and all the Advantages which we either enjoy, or of which we are capable: And, being committed under such strong Obligations to the contrary, must not only subject us to Punishment, but, in some sort, demand it; *for, the Wages of Sin is Death* [Rom. vi, 23.]: And, under these sad Circumstances, what can possibly relieve us?

The ancient World depended on Sacrifices, --- the Offering of Brute Creatures inferior to themselves. But these must be plainly insufficient, when we consider, that a Sacrifice of this Kind was an Offering to God of something that was *his* before; --- that the Death of a Creature, incapable of moral Agency, can be no equivalent for that of a Sinner; --- and that, at the most, Offerings of this Kind could only point out the Death which we ourselves deserved.

The modern Philosopher will say, Repentance is of itself sufficient for this Purpose: For, this being all that we are capable of doing
in

14 S E R M O N I.

in our present Circumstances, it must be all that God can justly expect from us.

On an Argument of this Kind Two Difficulties will arise; the One, that such a Repentance must be insufficient of itself;---and the Other, that no Man ever did, or ever can, in the strict Sense of the Word, repent fully;---I mean, so far turn himself again to God, as to perform an Obedience every way perfect.

As to the former, we should observe, that, having derived from God our very Being,---and being indebted to him for all our several Powers, he had a Right to the utmost we could do in his Service; in which, if we have once failed, no consequent Obedience can possibly repair the Fault: For that which would have been no more than Duty, in case we had never sinned, can make no Satisfaction for the Sinner.

Supposing, however, that a perfect Repentance; *i. e.* a consequent unerring Course of Duty might answer this Purpose; yet what can this avail us, if our moral Powers have been so impaired by Sin, that such a Repentance is, in our Circumstances, impossible? What, if the best we do, prove, in some respect or other, imperfect; and is so far

S E R M O N I. 15

far from making Amends for our past Errors, that it wants great Allowances to be made to itself, and cannot bear the strict Survey of the all-pure Being? And yet this is, in fact, our Case, and the desperate Condition in which we subsist without some farther Help.

Two Things therefore do, on this Foot, remain as necessary to be done for us: First, that Pardon be obtained for what is already past; and, in the next Place, that a consequent sincere, though imperfect, Obedience be accepted in the Room of that which is unfinning and perfect.

To obtain both these Ends, our Blessed Lord, out of infinite Compassion to Mankind, offered up Himself. For this he was qualified, as being entirely spotless, and so needing no Atonement on his own Account; --- and, being possessed of a Divine Nature, nothing he did for us could be strictly due from him: His Dignity, at the same Time, giving such a Value to what he did, as rendered it a sufficient Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World. Thus, *by his Stripes, are we healed*, and, by the Sacrifice of his Death, are ourselves restored to Life.

In consequence of this; *viz.* That the
Death

16 S E R M O N I.

Death of Christ was a perfect and full Atonement for us, and, as such, accepted by God, we may advance a Step farther, and maintain, that it hath purchased likewise for us that new Covenant of Grace, the accepting us upon a sincere, without an absolute and perfect, Obedience : For, if this Atonement be extended to *all* Sins, it must as well reach those which are committed after Baptism, as before it; and, of course, every Sin whatsoever, of which we repent, and endeavour, as much as possible, to avoid : On which Foot, whilst the Death of Christ is, in some Places, termed *a Sacrifice for Sin* [*Heb. ix. 26. x. 12.*], we elsewhere read of *the Blood of the Testament* [*Heb. ix. 20.*]; and, in my Text, of *the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith we are justified.*

But let no Men here deceive themselves ; let them not think that they are excused from Duty by that very Consideration, which enforces it upon them more strongly. The Subject before us tends to a very different Point ; for the Apostle himself teacheth us, that *the Goodness of God leadeth us to Repentance* [*Rom. ii. 4.*].

The real State of the Case is this : Our Blessed Lord, by what he hath done and suffered

S E R M O N I. 17

ferred for us, could never intend to encourage us in Sin : This would contradict the Design of his Coming, and the whole Matter of his Teaching. He intended, therefore, to prepare the Way, and to make us capable of Salvation; without which, all Endeavours to reform Mankind must be unavailable.

A Capacity of this kind was intended by God, and declared to be so, immediately upon the Fall of Man. The Death, which he had incurred, was in Time to be destroyed; --- and thus the Power of Sin subdued. Of this, Hopes were given in the very Sentence passed on *Adam*. These were afterward strengthened by occasional Revelations; and still farther heightened by the Sacrifices every-where offered; which, tho' of themselves ineffectual, yet acquired a Value from a Reference to that all-perfect Sacrifice which should in Time be offered.

This Grace of Pardon, thus obtained, neither doth nor can respect those Sins in which we persevere wilfully. An Obstinacy in sinning, is the Character of the evil Being, who is incapable of Pardon : And that, upon the account of which the Condition of Devils becomes desperate, can never render Men the proper Subjects of Forgiveness.

18 S E R M O N I.

So far is the Sacrifice of *Christ*, dying for us, and the Pardon of Sin thereby purchased, from dissolving our Obligations to a good Life, that in every View it heightens these Obligations; and we are Now more strongly bound to Obedience, than we were under the original Condition of our Nature.

Let us think what are the Expectations which one Man hath from another, upon the conferring on him some special Grace and Favour; — What, upon the forgiving Trespases against him; — What, upon the restoring him from the forlorn Condition, to which he was reduced by his Misbehaviour, and the purchasing this Restoration at his own dear Expende. Can he expect any thing less, than such a Sense of Obligation, as shall prevail with him to offend no more against so gracious a Benefactor? — at least, not to offend wilfully? And is not This the Case now before us?

Let us think what his Expectations must be, if the very Condition of conferring this Grace were, a Change of Conduct, and a better Behaviour for the future: Would, in such a Case, a Relapse into his former Crime be a Matter indifferent? — Or, would it not rather provoke, and exasperate? And yet this

S E R M O N I. 19

this most truly represents the Condition of Christians, who offend under the Gospel Dispensation.

Christ indeed died for all Men; yet the Benefit of his Death shall reach those only who submit to and obey him: To them only who amend their Lives, will he in the Event prove a Saviour: And, upon this account, are we exhorted to *repent*, that our Sins may be blotted out [*Acts* iii. 19.]; and our Apostle himself teacheth us, that *Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity; and purify to himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works* [*Tit.* ii. 14.].

Now, if this be the Condition of enjoying the Benefits of Christ's Passion, then, by not complying with this Condition, we renounce them: *We count the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith we are sanctified, an unholy Thing; i. e. We treat it as uselefs, and of no Value to us: And, of consequence, we offer as great an Indignity to our Blessed Lord, as the Jews themselves did of old, whilst we crucify him thus afresh, and put him to an open Shame.*

But let us stop in Season, whilst it is yet possible to recover ourselves: Let us consider, that, if we treat contemptuously this great Price of our Redemption, we have no

Resource left us ; *there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins* [Heb. x. 26.]. And, when we come to receive the Reward of our Presumption, it will be one Circumstance which must increase our Torment, That even Mercy itself could not save us.

3. It remains, that I now consider a Third Aggravation of Sin under the Gospel Dispensation ; *viz.* It implies a wilful and malicious Opposition to the Blessed Spirit, who hath been offered to us, and is ready to cooperate with us in the Discharge of our several Duties : We hereby *do Despise unto the Spirit of Grace.*

The Expression [*do Despise unto the Spirit of Grace*] must refer us to the Operations of the Holy Ghost, the Third Person in the Ever-Blessed Trinity, who constantly concurs with the Father and the Son in carrying on our Salvation. And these Operations may respect either what was done by him, in Confirmation of our Blessed Lord's Authority,---or, his more general Influence on the Minds of Men towards producing in them both Faith and Holiness.

If we consider them as respecting what was done in Confirmation of our Blessed Lord's Authority, we should note, that, as Christ appeared under an human Form, so his Authority

S E R M O N I. 21

thority must, in his first Claims of it, be supported in the very same Way as that of any other Prophet; and, consequently, Miracles were necessary to prove him to be a Person sent of God.

It is true indeed our Blessed Lord had a Divine Nature, in common with the Father and the Holy Ghost, and so might have wrought Miracles by his own inherent Power: But he proceeded in a different Way. The Divine Nature, though united to the Human, suspended its own Operations; on many Occasions, at least; and the Miracles, wrought in favour of his Mission, are by himself ascribed to the extraordinary Action of the Holy Ghost. Accordingly, the ascribing these, not to the Spirit of God, but to the Devil, he declares to be a Crime unpardonable: *This Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Men.*

But though, as not being ourselves Witnesses of the Miracles of Christ, we cannot now offend in the same Way as the Pharisees did, yet the standing out against such as are sufficiently attested, is an Approach toward this grievous Sin; and to continue impenitent under the Faith confirmed by them, is virtually to oppose these Miracles.

But, in the Argument before me, I am principally concerned to consider the ordinary Operations of the Holy Ghost on Mens Minds towards producing in them both Faith and Holiness: For this is one great Privilege of the Gospel, that the Holy Ghost is, in some Sense, given to every Man to assist and confirm him in both.

A Comforter of this Sort was expressly promised by our Blessed Lord to his Disciples, who should come and *abide with them for ever* [*John* xiv. 16.]; --- not only be present with them as God's Witness for them to the World, but likewise by an inward Energy upon their Minds. This, during the first Age of the Church, was manifested indeed by several extraordinary Gifts of Mind suitable to their then State; --- but, in other respects, it served to produce in them such religious Accomplishments, as must recommend them to the especial Favour of the Almighty.

It hath been mentioned before, that every Man hath greatly failed in the Discharge of his respective Duties. And, under the present Condition of his Nature, this was, in some sort, unavoidable: For, our very Constitution having been corrupted, a Principle hath been thereby implanted, and grown up in us,

S E R M O N I. 23

which bends us the wrong Way: We needed therefore the Operation of some contrary Power, which should counter-act this inward Biass, and give us a better and more reasonable Direction.

To this purpose our Blessed Lord hath imparted to us what we commonly understand by the Word GRACE;—or, to speak more strictly, hath sent us the Holy Ghost for our Assistance in our spiritual Progress. By Him, who is first imparted to us in Baptism (for we are then *born of the Spirit*, *John* iii. 5.), we are afterward directed and influenced; since it is *He who worketh in us to will and to do of his good Pleasure* [*Phil.* ii. 13.]. By Him *we are sanctified*, or made holy [*2 Thes.* ii. 13.]; and, agreeably to this, all our moral or religious Excellencies are ascribed to Him. *The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance* [*Gal.* v. 22, 23.]. If any one hath the Curiosity to enquire, How this Power is exercised upon us, it will be sufficient to say, That possibly it may be, by the Suggestion of good Thoughts; — by turning our Attention to those Thoughts which he suggests; — by bending, in this Way, our Wills; — by inducing us

to form correspondent Resolutions; — by confirming the Resolutions thus made; — and, lastly, by raising in our Minds such agreeable Perceptions, as shall encourage and support our Perseverance.

If it be farther enquired, How we can be sure, that any Power of this Kind is exerted at all; or, if it be, How we can distinguish it from the ordinary Operations of our Minds; — the Word of God will assure us of the former, which, from the very Nature of the Thing, we must discern is *possible*; — and, from many Circumstances which attend us, must appear likewise *probable*. And what if there should be no particular Marks, whereby the Actions of Grace are distinguishable from the Operations of our own Minds? The Thing will not be less credible, merely because it is by us unaccountable. Hear what our Blessed Lord himself saith upon the Point; *The Wind bloweth where it listeth; and thou hearest the Sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: So is every one that is born of the Spirit* [John iii. 8.]. In short, as God acteth upon the Minds of Men consistently with their Liberty, He must do it in a moral Way; in a Way agreeable to our Natures; and, consequently, in such a
one

S E R M O N I. 25

one as must leave us to judge of the Divine Operation rather from the Effect produced, than from the Manner of producing it.

Now, if this be the Case, then the Operations of the Holy Spirit are capable of being resisted by us. The good Thoughts, which he suggests, may be unheeded; his Motions may be withstood; and every thing else, which he offers for our Service, may be neglected. This, we see, may be; and happy were it, if this never in fact happened.

But, when it doth happen, *the Holy Spirit* is set forth *as grieved* upon our account [*Eph. iv. 30.*]; as, on the other Hand, we are told, that *there is Joy in Heaven upon the Repentance of a Sinner* [*Luke xv. 10.*]. So gracious is God to us, and so desirous of our Salvation, that though, in Strictness, he be incapable of Joy or Grief, yet, according to human Forms, he is, on these different Occasions, represented as affected by both.

If this be attended to, will there not arise another Aggravation of every Sin committed under the Gospel? For, in this Case, we not only disobey God, but we withstand him in his tenderest Endeavours even for our own Service.

Questions have been sometimes started
about

about the Sin against the Holy Ghost; --- that Sin, I mean, which is declared to be unpardonable by our Blessed Lord himself: And though, upon a thorough Examination, it will appear, that the Sin, thus spoken of, was peculiar to the Time of our Blessed Lord's Ministry, yet it deserves our most serious Attention, that as every Sin wilfully committed against the Suggestions of the Holy Ghost, is a Resistance of him, and a Grief to him, so it must make very near Approaches toward this Sin. To this Case may, in some degree, be applied what our Apostle saith; *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to Repentance* [Heb. vi. 6.]. And should this happen, that the Holy Ghost, by deserting us, should leave us to ourselves, and we, in consequence of this, should die in our Sins, we must then be lost for ever; so that, upon the whole, there will be no great Difference between these Two Cases: For, if the One be a Sin, which, upon account of some Circumstances, cannot now be committed; yet the Other (*viz.* Final Perseverance in sinning); is what neither will, nor possibly can,
be

S E R M O N I. 27

be forgiven. The Event will be the same in both Instances, though the Ways of producing this Event be not so.

Nor is this all, that Destruction must be, on such a Foot, *certain*; --- the Circumstance of forcing this Destruction upon ourselves, in opposition to the most sacred Remonstrances, will heighten it. *To do Despite to the Holy Spirit*,---to the Holy Spirit of Grace,---even in the very Exertion of this Grace itself, is such an Aggravation of Guilt, as must demand the severest Inflictions of Punishment. And therefore our Apostle very movingly presses it upon us, *How shall we escape if we neglect*,---and much more if we DESPISE, *so great a Salvation* [Heb. ii. 3.]?

From what hath been advanced, One Conclusion doth naturally offer itself: And it is this; From hence we may infer the Importance of Good Works in the Affair of our Salvation: For, in proportion as Sin (which is either the Absence, or the contrary, of Good Works) is aggravated, the Importance of them, in the Affair just mentioned, must, of course, be heightened.

This Conclusion is so manifest, and the Doctrine itself so expressly taught in Holy Scripture, that one might think no one, who hath

28 S E R M O N I.

hath the least Regard for an Authority of this kind, could possibly dispute it: For, whilst these Words are therein read, *Without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord* [Heb. xii. 14.]; whilst this most positive Direction of our Blessed Lord remains upon Record, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,---but he that doeth the Will of my Father, which is in Heaven* [Matt. vii. 21.]; and whilst the Measures of Proceeding at the last great Day are declared, even by Truth itself, to turn on *feeding the Hungry, Compassion to the Stranger, visiting the Sick*, and the like,---the Point I have now advanced must appear to be established on an unshaken Foundation: *And other Foundation can no Man lay*, than that which is laid by Jesus Christ himself.

But it hath been the Misfortune, that well-meaning and speculative Men have, in several Ages of the Church, been apt to refine on the Religion given us by *Christ*: And whilst they have endeavoured (as they thought) to improve its Interests by spiritualizing it, they have carried it beyond the Comprehensions of Men of sober Sense; and, in this Way, have given Occasion of Blaspheming to the Infidel, and of Profligacy to the Wicked.

The

S E R M O N I. 29

The Observation now made will be justified, by observing in what Manner the Doctrine of Good Works hath been sometimes treated : For, finding that great Stress is laid, in many Places of Scripture, on GRACE ;--- that by *this* we are pardoned [*Rom. v. 18.*] ; ---that by *this* we are saved [*Acts xv. 11.*] ; ---and *that eternal Life* is none other than *the Gift of God* [*Rom. vi. 23.*] ; ---they have concluded, that nothing can to any Purpose be done on our Part, but to accept of this Grace ; and to ascribe any thing to the Good Works we perform, hath been thought to derogate from the Freeness and Excellency of Grace : On which Foot, as the Infidel must triumph in the ill-judged Opposition between Grace so stated, and the reasonable Ground of this Grace,---so the Wicked will be hardened in the Commission of Sin, whilst he is taught, That the Practice of Good Works is of no manner of Consequence.

The true State of the Matter seems to be this ;---As, agreeably to what hath been laid down before, Repentance can make no Amends for Sin, so the Pardon of Sin must be entirely owing to Grace ; ---to Grace, I mean, as the inward Principle moving the Supreme Being to grant it, though it should

should please him, in his Wisdom, to prescribe some necessary Conditions, on which this Favour is bestowed. The Necessity of fulfilling such Conditions will in no way derogate from this Grace itself; since, without it, the Guilt of Sin must still remain on us; and the Sinner, though repentant, being still a Sinner, he must be accountable for the past Violations of God's Law.

We maintain therefore not only the Necessity, but even the Rank and Dignity of *pardonning Grace*, in the strongest Manner; since it is to *this* only we can owe our Hopes, notwithstanding the utmost we can do. Works, of themselves, will not profit. Grace or Favour must precede these very Works: Grace likewise must accompany them (for it is by the Assistance of *this* that we work); and, when we have done our best, we still need a farther Grace;---I mean, a favourable Allowance for the Imperfection of these Works themselves.

We may carry the Matter still farther, and affirm, not only that Grace is necessary, in order to Salvation, on the Foot of our present fallen State, but that it must have been so likewise, in case Man had never sinned at all. Even *then* eternal Life must have been the
Gift

S E R M O N I. 31

Gift of God: It must be *that*, which he was under no Obligation to bestow, other than what should arise from the Determination of his own free Will, and a consequent Promise to bestow it.

Pray, could any Man have a Right to Being itself before he was created?—Could he have any Right to the Continuance of this Being? Might not God, without being accountable, withdraw this Being, if he should so please? What Right then could he have to an eternal Continuance of this Being;—and this likewise in such a State of Happiness, as we understand by ETERNAL LIFE? Perhaps this may carry the Matter a little farther than the zealous Contenders for Grace may have thought of: And yet this is no more than may justly be contended for.

But, though we maintain that Grace (*i. e.* gratuitous Favour) was necessary, even in the most perfect State of human Nature, yet Good Works were, even *then*, the Condition of enjoying it: And this we see, not only from the express Words of God himself [*In the Day that thou eatest of the Fruit of the Tree thou shalt surely die*, Gen. ii. 17.],—but likewise from Matter of Fact: For Man fell from this Grace by Disobedience;—and thereby

thereby entail'd on us a Corruption of Nature, and a Forfeiture of Happinefs.

Whilst we maintain this Kind of Doctrine, let no Man charge us with favouring any Degree of *Merit* in Good Works, if the Word *Merit* be understood in the strict and proper Sense of it. I know none who contend for that Sort of Doctrine but the Members of the Church of *Rome*; and these, I conceive, contend for it, not as being really convinced of its Truth, but only as it serves their Interest: For common Reason, as well as the most express Declarations of Holy Scripture, explode it.

Merit there cannot be with reference to our Conduct towards God, unless we were capable, in some Way or other, of bettering his Condition, and that likewise by performing what we were under no Obligations to perform. But God is all-perfect, and all-happy; and we, considered only as Creatures, are incapable of doing any Good, which we are not, in virtue of that very Relation, obliged to perform. Let us consult Scripture, where we find *Jacob*, a Patriarch of high Character, thus expressing his Sense of the Matter; *I am not worthy of the least of all the Mercies, which God hath shewed unto his*

S E R M O N I. 33

his Servant [Gen. xxxii. 10.]; and our Blessed Lord himself declares, *When ye have done all those Things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable Servants; we have done that which was our Duty to do.* [Luke xvii. 10.] In short, MERIT carries with it a Claim of Right to something on the Foot of our own original Ability; which is entirely inconsistent with the Character of a Creature, who is dependent for every thing, which he either hath, or can possibly do.

And yet, though we do in these strong Terms disclaim all Pretence to Merit, properly so called, still we dare not say, there is nothing of real Value even in our best Performances. Let us put a Case: Suppose our Actions were perfectly right; *i. e.* exactly conformable to the Divine Law, as those of our First Parent were during the State of Innocence; would there, upon this Supposition, be nothing valuable in these Performances? Would not God look on them with an Eye of Approbation and Complacency, as he did on the Works of the Creation when they first came out of their Maker's Hands? And could he approve of what was, in no respect, valuable? Are we not told, that *the Ornament of a meek and quiet Spirit, is, in*

the Sight of God, of great Price? [1. Pet. iii. 4.] And that, *in the Sight of the Lord, the Death of his Saints is precious?* [Psal. cxvi. 15.]

Whatever is right, is valuable: What is perfectly so, is perfectly valuable: And therefore, whatever implies an Approach towards what is right, must be so likewise in Proportion: Even the lowest Degree of moral Excellency (for Degrees of it there are most certainly) ought not to be utterly despised; not only as such lower Degrees lead us on to those which are higher,---but for this Reason also, that they carry with them something in its own Nature excellent. Upon account of this it may be, that, in the popular Use of Language, Good Actions are frequently termed WORTHY; and the Word MERIT is sometimes used in this large Sense, by Persons who disclaim the Popish Notion of Merit most perfectly. And though Expressions of this kind may not be *exact*, yet all Languages abound in them; --- they are readily understood by all that hear them; and every candid Hearer makes such Allowances for them as the popular Use of Language requires.

To go on: Though, in our Account of Things, there be somewhat of real Value in
Good

S E R M O N I. 35

Good Works; we must maintain however, that this can afford no Ground for Confidence: For, if we have nothing which is properly our own; --- if we are indebted to the Supreme Being, as for our Existence, so likewise for every Power we enjoy; ---if it be by Him, that we are made capable of performing Good Works;--and, which is more, if the very Power of working them cannot be exerted, but by his Concurrence with us, --- then we can render nothing to him, which we had not first received: And, *if we have received it, how can we boast as if we had not received it?* [1. Cor. iv. 7.]

In truth, there is so little Room for boasting left us, that, in every View we can possibly take of Man, we see nothing but what will mortify our Pride, and serve to keep down all high Thoughts in reference to our moral Condition: For, beyond what hath been just now noted, that *Man* must, by his very Nature, be dependent;---and therefore *in his best State*, his most innocent Condition, *altogether Vanity*:---How much lower ought we to sink in the Esteem of ourselves, when we consider Mankind as fallen from Virtue,---corrupted in his Nature,---with a wrong Bias within him,---contending per-

36 S E R M O N I.

petually with this evil Principle, over which he is unable to get the better, but by a Power which is not his own :---When we consider farther, that the Progress which we make towards this Victory, is not at once, but gradual and slow ; --- not to be perfected in this Life ; --- and therefore, that the very best Men, when they have done their best, have gone no farther than to render themselves the proper Objects of Mercy, --- how ought we to prostrate ourselves before the Divine Majesty ! --- and to say, after all our Christian Labours, *Not unto us, not unto us, but to thy Name be the Praise !* [Psf. cxv. 1.]

Having thus finished what I proposed on my general Subject, I shall now address myself to Three Sorts of Persons, by Way of Application ; and these are, the Good, the Weak, and the Profligate.

To the Good I would address myself, in order to enforce on them Perseverance. They have the Happiness of having made a good Progress in the Christian Course, and of being established in it in a great Degree already : They have felt the Pleasure of doing Good ; --- have had a comfortable Sense of God's Favour ; --- and even enjoyed the Hope of what they expect to enjoy hereafter.

These

These Things of themselves are great Encouragements. Still let them consider, that they are yet in a State of Tryal: Their Condition is not absolutely fixed: They may notwithstanding fall; for all Tryal supposes a Possibility of falling. This surely is a Ground of Caution; and they cannot attend to this Circumstance too closely.

Let them consider (for it infinitely imports them to consider it), that, if they should fail, all their past Labours in Religion are lost: For, these are the Words of Truth itself, *When a righteous Man turneth away from his Righteousness, and committeth Iniquity, and dieth in it;—for his Iniquity that he hath done, shall he die.* [Ezek. xviii. 26.]

Yet this, bad as it is, must not be esteemed all. His former Sense and Experience of what is right, will make his Fall from it the more heavy;—will cut off all manner of Excuse for his Conduct; and, whilst it produces in him a Regret for what is lost, will heighten the Misery which he hath brought upon himself.

Hear what *St. Peter* saith on this very Case; *If, after Men have escaped the Pollutions of the World, through the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are*

again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter End is worse with them than the Beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the Way of Righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy Commandment delivered unto them. [2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.]

To the WEAK I would address myself, in order to strengthen and confirm them. These, though they have entered on a religious Course, yet have not proceeded far. Their State is as yet unsettled. If they make good Resolutions, yet these Resolutions do often fail them. They feel an evil Principle within them, with which they are contending, and over which they find some Difficulty to get the perfect Victory.

However, let not such as these despair, nor in the least abate their most earnest and vigorous Endeavours. They have a superior Power ready to assist them, if they will accept his Assistance; and which will enable them to become more than Conquerors.

It is true, they are as yet only in a progressive State: But still, as it is progressive, Things will mend every Day. The Difficulties of Obedience will wear off: Duty will become more agreeable; Their present Dif-

S E R M O N I. 39

Dispositions, however weak, will improve into Habits: And Habits, once confirmed, will become reigning Principles within them.

But see the Consequence, if they shall happen to draw back. Their Prospect must not only be dark, but dreadful. By *quenching the Holy Spirit*, which had hitherto been their quickening Principle, and would in time have produced in them a confirmed spiritual Life, they will find it very difficult to restore themselves. Perhaps they may never be restored at all; and then all that hath been said concerning the Aggravation of Sin, will affect them most grievously: God will be provoked; and *Who may stand in his Sight when he is angry?*

I shall, Lastly, address myself to the PROFLIGATE, to reclaim them, if I can, from the dangerous, and almost desperate, Condition they are in.

These being as it were dead in Trespasses and Sins, must be awakened, and alarmed by the Terror of that Destruction, which is just ready to overtake them.

But Persons of this Character do not often resort to Places of sacred Instruction: They are even *in Love with Darknes*; and come not to the Light, lest their Deeds should be reprov'd. [*John iii. 20.*]

Yet,

40 S E R M O N I.

Yet, if there be any of that Sort now present, to THEM I address myself. Perhaps the Solemnity of the Place may, in some sort, affect them, and make way for the Instructions I would offer.

Consider, therefore, before it be too late. It is no Matter of Indifference which is now before you. It is your All. Your eternal State is the Question. An Eternity of insupportable Torment is just opening upon you ; of which if you have any Sense, you must *wish* to avoid it ; for no one can chuse Misery : And, if you wish this, you must endeavour, if possible, to escape it.

Your Condition indeed is very deplorable ; but not quite desperate. Your very Sense of Danger (if such a Sense you have) will minister somewhat of Hope. *God willeth not the Death of a Sinner : He had rather be shoud turn, and live.* To him therefore address yourselves, for the Mercy of Pardon, and for the Aids of Grace, with a full Resolution, in Concurrence with *that* Grace, to amend the Error of your Ways. On Resolutions of this kind God will bestow a Blessing. By this Blessing on your own earnest Endeavours much may yet be done. The penitent Thief, a Person more obnoxious than,

S E R M O N I. 41

than, I hope, any of you are, was yet received even at the last Hour. His Sincerity made amends for the Shortness of his Time, and the Want of Opportunities.

I leave this upon your Minds:---And shall now close my Discourse with this earnest Wish, in behalf of myself and every other Christian, that we may all duly consider the Aggravations of Sin, and the Consequence attending it; and then we shall never be induced by any Desires, or Hopes in Life,---or by any Fear, or even Pains of Death, to fall from God.

Now to God the Father, &c. *Amen.*

S E R-

S E R M O N II.

Reflections on the Dispute between
ST. PAUL and BARNABAS.

ACTS xv. 39.

*And the Contention was so sharp between them,
that they departed asunder one from the other.*

IT is One great Advantage to the Sacred History, and such as must give it high Credit with every reasonable Man, that it discovers the strictest Impartiality in the several Relations of Facts which it delivers; neither aggravating beyond due Bounds the Actions of bad Men, nor concealing the Errors and Miscarriages of the Good.

Even *Moses*, the great Minister of God in delivering the *Jewish* Law, and Author of the ancient History of the *Jews*, did not spare himself;

44 S E R M O N I I .

himself; but recorded his own Faults, as well as the Follies and Disobedience of that People: And *St. Luke*, who hath given us Accounts of the first Preachers of Christianity, interspersed his Relations with Remarks on those Great Men's Failings: By this shewing, that Men's *Faith* in the Gospel *doth not stand in the Wisdom or Righteousness of Men, but in the Goodness and Power of God.*

Out of the many Instances to this Purpose, which are obvious and ready for our Use, I shall chuse to insist at present on the Particular which the Text records;—the Dispute between *St. Paul* and *Barnabas*; which was carried to such an Height, that they broke off Communication with each other; and, parting asunder, each adhered firmly to his own Project, and pursued it as far as he possibly could.

Such a Dispute, in the very Infancy of the Christian Church, must have a bad Appearance, and be likely to be attended with pernicious Consequences. This Consideration ought to have prevailed with the unhappy Disputants to be yielding and moderate. But they seem to have been too far governed by their Passions: They did not sufficiently at-
tend

S E R M O N II. 45

tend to the Reason of the Thing, and the Necessity of their Affairs: And the Effect might have been destructive, had not Providence interposed to bring Good out of Evil, and to turn the very Passions of Men to its own great Purposes and Designs.

The State of the Case was this: By the joint Labours of *St. Paul* and *Barnabas*, Churches had been planted in several Cities; after which, some Time having been spent in settling Affairs at *Antioch*, *St. Paul* was desirous of visiting those Churches.—In this they both agreed: But then a Difference arose between them about one of their Associates in this Work. *Barnabas* was determined to take *John* with them, whose Surname was *Mark*:—But *Paul* thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from *Pamphylia*, and went not with them to the Work; ver. 37, 38. It doth not appear with Certainty from this History, for what Reasons *Mark* had formerly deserted them; Whether he had any just and sufficient Motives for doing so,—Or, whether he were discouraged by the mere Difficulty of the Work before them. But it seems this *Mark* was Kinsman to *Barnabas* [*vide* Col. iv. 10.], which was probably the Ground of his extraordinary Attachment

46 S E R M O N II.

tachment to him; and the jealous Apprehension that *Mark* might desert them again, upon the Appearance of new Difficulties, induced *St. Paul* to carry the Matter farther than in Reason and Prudence he should have done. That *Barnabas* should bear a particular Regard to his Kinsman, is not to be wondered at: And that *St. Paul* should be suspicious of a Person, who had failed them formerly, is no more than might naturally be expected. But yet, there doth not appear to have been any sufficient Grounds for either Side to espouse his own Opinions so stiffly,—to dispute the Point so eagerly,—and to persist so resolutely, as to hazard the Peace of the Church, and the Success even of the Christian Cause.

If a Regard to Relations be commendable, whilst kept within proper Bounds, yet the Interests of Religion are of much higher Concern; and our Blessed Saviour expressly tells us, *If any Man love Father or Mother more than me, he is not worthy of me* [Matt. x. 37.]. And so again, If a watchful Jealousy over every thing which regards the Interests of Religion be necessary, yet even This will be carried too far, if it degenerate into Suspiciousness; and especially, if it shall run
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S E R M O N I I. 47

a Man into *certain* Difficulties, by avoiding such as are merely *possible*.

Having thus explained the Case of *St. Paul* and *Barnabas*, and the Misunderstanding which arose between them, I shall beg Leave to make one Observation on this History; and it is this:

From the Characters of these Two zealous Propagators of our Faith, compared with their Conduct on the present Occasion, it will be natural to make this Remark; *viz.* That the very greatest and best Men are liable to Infirmities.

So far as this regards what is past, it is a Matter of Fact, and capable of being supported, as other Facts are, by History and Experience: In which View of the Thing I may demand, What Person hath there been among mere Men, against whom no Objections can be made? If *Moses*, the meekest Man upon Earth, was yet transported, on a certain Occasion, with Excess of Anger;—and if *Job*, who is set forth to us as the Pattern of Patience, did yet, in the Height of his Affliction, utter Things which he understood not;—where shall we meet with a perfect and unexceptionable Character? The Sacred Writings contain the History of those
who

48 S E R M O N II.

who were under the more especial Guidance of God's Spirit: And yet in this History we are so far from finding an entire Perfection in any mere Man, that some Errors are noted in the very best. The Adultery of *David*,---the Idolatry of *Solomon*,---the Perfidy of *St. Peter*,---and the Cowardice of all the rest of the Apostles, who deserted their Lord in his greatest Extremities, are all Evidences how defective the most consummate human Virtue is, in the present State at least, and till we are removed out of this sinful World. Where then are we to look for Instances of complete Excellence?---Not amongst the vulgar Heathen, whose Corruptions were as great as their Ignorance;---Not amongst the ancient Heroes and Governors of the Vulgar, who were generally more wicked, because more inexcusable;---and, lastly, Not even among the Philosophers, whose Doctrines did, in many Instances, reproach their Lives; and who, at the best, were rather less criminal than entirely innocent.

Thus the Matter will appear on the Foot of History; and, if we consider what our own Experience teaches concerning the present Condition of our Nature, thus it must be :

S E R M O N II. 49

be: For human Reason (in moral Matters especially) is weak, whilst our sensual Passions and Appetites are strong; from whence it happens, that the right Ballance being lost, our consequent Actions will be uncertain and irregular. But, when I speak of the Weakness of human Reason in moral Matters, I do not here trouble myself whether it be capable, by its own Strength, of fixing the moral Rule, or no: We Christians, having a Divine Institution to direct us, are less concerned about any other sufficient Guide. At present I consider Reason only as that Principle which applies and makes the moral Rule effectual; in which respect so far forth as our Reason fails us, or its Operations are suspended by the more powerful Sollicitations of Passion, so far we shall come short of what might have been expected otherwise, and be liable to frequent moral Disorders.

Who then is there so little acquainted either with himself or with the World, as not to know, that the best moral Rules, and even those which in Theory Men approve, frequently become ineffectual, because they are not perpetually present to their Minds; — because, if present, they are not sufficiently attended to; — — because, if attended to

50 S E R M O N II.

in some degree, yet the several Motives, which should enforce the Practice of them, are out of View ; and because the Execution of those Sanctions, by which moral Rules are supported, is distant, whilst Temptations to sin are ready and urgent. It is the proper Business of Reason to guard against all these Inconveniencies. But doth our Reason do so? Or, indeed, in the present State of Things, can it be expected to do so universally and to Effect?

Beyond this Weakness on the Part of Reason, doth not every Man feel within him a secret Enemy, a Part even of himself? I mean, Desires arising from the animal Constitution, which, having a wrong Turn from the Beginning, grow faster than Reason itself does ; inasmuch that, before we come to the full Use of our Faculties, they fix a sort of Empire over us, of which they must be dispossessed, before an uniform Course of Virtue can be carried on. During this Contention between Two opposite Principles, and till an absolute Victory can be obtained, we shall not only find the Operations of Reason resisted on many Occasions, but on many likewise entirely over-ruled ; so that this Dispute will be attended, as most others are, with a Variety

S E R M O N II. 51

Variety as well of Disappointment as Success: And after all, when we have done our best, and made as great Advancements in the moral Character as we can, yet there will still remain so much Weakness in the Understanding, --- so much Perverseness in the Will, --- so much Impetuosity in the Passions, --- and these all so constantly solicited by outward Temptations, --- that it cannot be expected but some things, more or less, will be wrong, and unfit to bear the strict Survey of infinite Purity.

From this State of the Case, --- though we cannot defend the Conduct of the Two Great Men recorded in the Text, --- yet much may be pleaded in Abatement of their respective Demerits. The general End of both was noble. Each meant to pursue this End in the Way which to each seemed most useful: But they differed about this Way; and which of them judged most rightly, is not perhaps so easy to be determined. This only can be said; That since the taking *Mark* with them, or the leaving him behind, was by no means necessary to their visiting the Churches, it is Pity such a Point should create any Matter of Dispute at all: But, when it came to be disputed, and each appeared to

52 S E R M O N II.

be so much interested in the Affair,---it is a much greater Pity it should be carried so far, ---that neither should yield any thing to the other; --- especially where their common Cause was so likely to suffer by the Dispute, ---and where the yielding Person, by making a Sacrifice of his own Inclination, must, upon the whole, have gained a much greater Victory than he could lose.

It may be proper to pass on from the particular Case of *St. Paul* and *Barnabas* to ourselves, and see whether somewhat may not be concluded, from the foregoing Reflections, of Use even in the present Times.

From the Reflections already offered, may be drawn a just Reproof of those Persons, who pretend to a sinless Perfection, and exact the same from others, or at least recommend it as attainable in the present State. But hath this Perfection appeared in any mere Man, who hath gone before us? Or, indeed, considering the Condition of our present Nature, and the Circumstances of the World, Can it be expected in any one? A Time was, when Man subsisted in a State of Innocence; for God created him in his own Image: But did he long retain his Innocence? When Sin entered, it spread a Corruption through the whole

S E R M O N II. 53

whole human Frame: Corruption, thus produced, hath been ever since propagated: We perceive it in others; we feel it in ourselves; and the constant Experience of all Ages confirms what *St. Paul* delivers on this Point; 'That the Good which we would, we do not; and the Evil which we would not, that we do.' [*Rom. vii. 19.*]

Thus, perhaps the *Perfectionist* will say, the Matter may stand on the mere Foot of human Ability: For here he affects to be modest, and is so far from allowing too much to the Advantage of Nature, that he detracts from it that very Excellence, which is essential to our Nature. The Language in which he seems to delight, will be shocking to others, viz. 'That Man, in his natural State, is *Half Devil; Half Beast.*'

But is this a true Representation of the natural State of Man? If it be, Whence then can he rise to a sinless Perfection, — the State even of Angels, the best and most excellent Part of the moral Creation? We nowhere read Accounts, in any sober Writer, of the moral Perfection superinduced on Beasts, or of the sinless Perfection superinduced on Devils. But all this he ascribes to the Grace of God working by itself, as without our De-

54 S E R M O N II.

fert, so without our Concurrence. We allow to Grace all that can be allowed to it; all that Scripture will warrant, and sober Reason can admit of: But Scripture never mentions Devils as the Objects of Grace: And, in the Accounts of sober Reason, as Beasts are no moral Agents, they must be Subjects incapable of moral Influence: So that, according to the foregoing Representation of the natural State of Man, he is so far from being capable of sinless Perfection, that he is entirely incapable of any moral Perfection at all.

The Perfectionists, we see, may be refuted in their Pretensions from their own avowed Principles. But we need not take this Advantage. Let us consider the Matter on a more reasonable Foot, and see whether the Grace of God, operating on such a Creature as Man, and under such Circumstances as Man subsists in during the present State, can be supposed to produce in him a sinless Perfection.

To this Purpose we are concerned to note, that by *Grace* (according to the common Sense of the Word) we are not to understand the irresistible Power of God (this we should express by the Term *Power*, and not by *Grace*);

S E R M O N II. 55

Grace); --- but we mean, that *moral* Application to, or Influence on, the Mind by the Supreme Being, which is intended to produce a *moral* Effect in a *moral* Agent. I am not obliged here to go any farther into this Subject; and have noted this at present merely to fix the proper Meaning of the Word, and prepare the Way to an Argument I would mention.

Now, if this Account be true, then the Effects of the Divine Grace on Man must be proportionable to the Disposition of his Mind, and the Circumstances which attend him: And therefore, if his Condition in both respects be such as qualifies him, not for the Attainment of entire sinless Perfection here, but only for the making nearer Approaches towards it, we must conclude, that, notwithstanding the Grace of God, Man must still continue in a greater or less Degree imperfect; which Imperfections, though incapable of being entirely removed in the present Constitution of Things, shall cease in another State to come hereafter; in which, all Temptations to Sin being removed, the Divine Grace shall have its complete Effect; --- in which the Understanding shall see more clearly, the Will chuse more discreetly, and

56 S E R M O N II

the Affections, unsolicited by vicious Objects, and gently led by the Holy Spirit, shall eternally conspire with the Understanding and the Will in producing the most consummate Virtue. Here all irregular Passions shall subside, the Fewel which once supported them being removed; and the Differences between the Two great Men in the Text (though they had not been composed before) be made up for ever; each wondering, in some sort, at himself, how he came to differ with the other; and thence discerning, in a more perfect Manner than he did formerly, his own past Imperfections and Errors.

I shall just note one thing more on this Point: That the Imperfection of our most improved moral State, during the present Life, is not a mere visionary Scheme, supported only by Pretences of Reason, but agreeable with the Scripture Accounts, will appear from hence,---that *St. James* tells us, [ch. iii. ver. 2.] *In many Things we offend all; and St. John*, [1 John i. 8.] *If we say that we have no Sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us.*

I hope I may now assume this Matter as a Truth sufficiently proved and justified: But as all Truths of this kind, when applied
rightly,

rightly, carry with them some valuable Consequences, so, by a Misapplication, they are capable of being perverted to the most dangerous and worst Purposes.

Thus as to the Point I have hitherto considered; the reflecting on the Infirmary of our present moral Condition may have, and sometimes hath had, opposite Effects on Persons of opposite Tempers; who going into Extremes on different Sides, and applying this Truth in Conformity to their own wrong Dispositions, have run themselves either into *Presumptuousness* of sinning on the one hand, or *Despair* of performing any acceptable Duty on the other.

The former are the Gay, the Airy, and Thoughtless; who loving Pleasure, and caring not for the Trouble of watching and controuling their Passions, have been willing to persuade themselves, that, since their utmost Endeavours will not secure them against *all* Sin, they need be less solicitous about the avoiding *any* Sin. I do not suppose Persons of this Humour to be entirely divested of moral Principles: They may see and know, in many Instances, what is right: But reflecting, that, if they should endeavour to do their best, yet their Practice will not come
up

58 S E R M O N II.

up to the Purity of their Principles ; --- and, having observed many Errors in the Performances even of the best Men, they chuse to lay aside a Care, which appears to them so useless : They charge even their worst Sins not upon themselves (as in truth they ought), but upon the Constitution of their Nature ; and foolishly persuade themselves either that Sin is no Offence to God, or, if it be so, will most readily be excused by him. And thus, by the Perversion of a salutary Truth, they are gradually led on from one Sin to another, till at last they sink themselves in the very Depth of Corruption and Wretchedness.

In my Application to such Persons as these, I would remind them, that God requires the utmost that we can do. We are to love him with *all our Heart*, and *all our Strength*. [Luke x. 27.] And if the unhappy Condition of our Nature be such, that we cannot do all we would, — this Consideration must be a wretched Excuse for not doing what we might have performed by Care. It is true, no one is absolutely perfect : But then, are we incapable of making any Approaches towards Perfection ? And are we not concerned to make such Approaches, notwithstanding
entire

S E R M O N II. 59

entire Perfection is unattainable? Surely there are Degrees of moral Excellence. To be not quite abandoned, is something: To be virtuous as to the main, though this Virtue be attended with many and great Imperfections, is better: And to attain to such a Degree of habitual Holiness, as to fall into no gross Acts of Vice; ---to have the Understanding rightly informed as to the Matter of Duty; ---the Will, in all material Points, conformable; ---and the Passions so rightly turned, as rather to aid than hinder our Obedience: ---this is a State the most highly desirable: It is the State which God expects we should attain to; and such a one as we may attain, by that Care and Application which we are apt to use in other very concerning Affairs. I do not say, that the Generality of Christians do, in fact, proceed thus far: Most Men are too indolent in a Matter the most important that can be imagined: But yet, there are Men who have gone thus far; and all others might do so likewise, under like Circumstances, and by equal Care: And if Men can be prevailed with to do this, or to go so far in the doing it as the Circumstances of their Case will admit of, we have all Reason to believe that a merciful God will approve such Endeavours, and

accept

60 S E R M O N II.

*accept a Man according to that which he hath,
and not according to that which he hath not.*
[2. Cor. viii. 12.]

The suggesting this leads me on to that other Misapplication of the Doctrine advanced, and which I mentioned just before; viz. A Despair of performing any acceptable Duty at all.

As the former Sort of Persons I had to deal with, were the Gay and Airy, these, on the other hand, are the Melancholy and Superstitious; who meaning well, and finding it impossible to perform all the good Things they mean, cherish endless Scruples. With such as these, their very best Actions are not only devoid of Merit (as in truth they are), but Sins of a very heinous Nature: Their tender Consciencess aggravate every Circumstance to the Disadvantage of such Actions; and attending rather to the Good, in which they have failed, than that Virtue which they have really attained, they labour under all the Horror of Guilt; and so, with Dispositions which might otherwise make them agreeable to their Neighbours, and happy in themselves, become morose, and sour, and wretched. Nor is this the worst: For it sometimes happens, that, the Terrors from
hence

S E R M O N II. 61

hence arising being insupportable, their Reason is quite overborn; they run themselves into Distraction; and, by this means, prevent the Possibility of returning to a better Judgment of Things. Or, if this should not prove the Case, yet another Consequence is to be dreaded: The Despair of doing any thing acceptable may damp all Endeavours toward doing it. Thinking their Case cannot be rendered worse than it is already, they may become utterly regardless of their Actions; and, since they know not how to answer the too high Demands of a scrupulous Conscience, take the Method which other desperate Debtors are wont to do; *viz.* endeavour to lay aside all Thought of their Condition. And thus a too superstitious Rigour, if not corrected, may be found to end in the most profligate and abandoned Course of Living.

Persons of this Cast, as they are the most moving Objects of our Compassion, so they deserve, as well as need, all the Assistance that can be given them: And as their Difficulties arise from a Principle in itself right, but only rendered wrong by being strained too far, so, in our Application to them, we must use our Endeavours to keep them within sober Bounds.

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62 S E R M O N II.

The Persons, I am here concerned with, would be perfect: And they are so far right, that, as the Rule set before us is perfect, and as the great Example proposed for our Imitation is, in like manner, perfect, so we are obliged to strive most earnestly to obey this Rule, and to copy after this Example. But then it ought to be no Discouragement to us, that, after having used these Endeavours, we still fall short of both; because the Equity of the Gospel comes in to our Assistance. This is plainly a Dispensation of Mercy. It is founded on the Consideration of our Depravity, which renders us incapable of coming up to the Strictness of our moral Rule; and is intended to save those, who could have no sufficient Assurance of Salvation on any other Foot. It not only explains the Rule of Duty more perfectly than had been done before, but points out the Abatements which an all-merciful Being is disposed to make as to our strict Conformity to this Rule; and (which is still of higher Comfort) it unfolds the Reasons on which God hath been pleased to make these Abatements, and to receive us to Favour. It had been Matter of high Consolation, if we had only Hope given us, that God would not be extream to mark what

hath

S E R M O N II. 63

hath been done amiss : But since he hath in the strongest Manner confirmed this Hope, — and sent his own Son into the World to make Satisfaction for the Sins of Mankind, — What Room is there left to despair of that Favour, it is so much our Interest to embrace? The whole is now put within our own Power. Every Man may do his best; to suppose otherwise, were absurd : And to do our best, is all God expects from us : It is what, if done, He will approve ; and, in consequence of such Approbation, will reward.

There is one thing still behind, which ought to administer Comfort to those; who are apt to lament most feelingly the Imperfection of their present moral Condition ; I mean, that the very Occasion of their Grief, when rightly considered, is an Argument in their Favour.---They are dejected, because they discern so great a Distance between the Perfection of their best Actions, and that Exactness which the Rule of Duty prescribes. But can Men discern this, and afflict themselves on the Discovery, without having that Sense of Duty, which is itself an Excellence? Without having that Goodness of Temper, which cannot fail of recommending them to an all-merciful God?---In short, without being

ing possessed of such a Principle, as, by the Divine Grace assisting, will enable them to go on to higher Degrees,---and in time raise them (in the next Life at least) to that very Perfection they aspire after?

I have thus far considered the several Misapplications of the Doctrine before us: It will now be proper to see what useful Deductions may be made from it. Those I shall mention directly relate to Practice, and shew how, from the very Consideration of our Imperfection, we may be led, and even urged on, to improve and better ourselves.

To this Purpose we may observe, that the more imperfect we are (if there yet remains in us any Ability of doing right) the more are we concerned to use our utmost Vigour to strengthen this Power, and to better our Condition. Ours is a State of Distress and Danger. But the Reflection on both these (if duly attended to) will induce us to use all our Strength to escape this Danger, and to relieve ourselves under this Distress. The most watchful Care therefore, and the most earnest Diligence in our spiritual Concerns, as they are necessary on account of our present Condition, are most strongly suggested to us from considering this Condition.

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S E R M O N II. 65

We may observe farther, that our moral Powers are so exceedingly weakened by the Fall of our first Parents, and so much farther impaired by many unhappy Accidents in Life, that, according to *St. Paul*, [*Rom. vii. 18.*] *though to will be present with us, yet how to perform that which is good, we find not.* But, weak as we are in this respect, we are not quite destitute. — God's Grace, which is sufficient, is likewise ready to assist us: And though of ourselves we are, as it were, nothing, yet can we *do all things through Christ, who strengtbeneth us.* These Things Being laid together, the Conclusion will be manifest; that, as we are concerned to be earnest in our Supplications for the Divine Grace, so are we likewise, when obtained, to ascribe to it the Glory of that spiritual Success, which so greatly depended on it.

These Two Conclusions might be farther enlarged upon; and indeed they well deserve to be so: But at present I would chuse to insist on some other Considerations more nearly relating to the Case of *St. Paul* and *Barnabas*. I have grounded this Discourse on the unhappy Dispute which arose between them; and I am willing to keep that Point constantly in my View.

66 S E R M O N II.

Here then we should observe, from considering the Errors of the Two great Men before us, and the general Infirmary of our Nature, which their Errors exemplify to us; — we should observe, I say, what Charity we are concerned to use in censuring the Imperfections of one another.

We are not indeed distinctly informed concerning the Dispute between *St. Paul* and *Barnabas*. We are only told, that *the Contention between them was sharp*; and that the Event of it was a thorough Breach between them: Yet, from the Circumstances, we may guess, at least, at the Particulars of the Dispute. The main Point, as I noted in the Beginning, was built on a Question, whether they should take *Mark* with them, as an Associate in their Labours; a Person who, on the one hand, was nearly related to *Barnabas*; and, on the other, had deserted his Fellow-Labourers in *Pamphylia*, and went not with them to the Work. It is natural to presume, on this Occasion, *St. Paul* might blame the Partiality of *Barnabas*, who was too unreasonably attached to his Kinsman; and that *Barnabas* likewise might blame the jealous Temper of *St. Paul*, which would not permit him to make any Allowances for the

S E R M O N II. 67

the Excuses of his Kinsman;---or, admitting the utmost, would needlessly conclude, from a Person's having done One wrong Thing, he must be incapable of ever doing a right Thing. This might perhaps be farther aggravated. *St. Paul* might possibly reproach *Barnabas* with his late undue Compliance with *St. Peter*, when, being carried away with his Diffimulation, he gave too much Countenance to the Superstition of the *Jewish* Converts: As, on the other hand, *Barnabas* might, in his Turn, reproach the indiscrete Warmth of *St. Paul*, which had heretofore carried him into extreme Lengths, and made him, in the worst Sense of the Expression, *a Persecutor of the Church of God*. Thus possibly (for we can only guess at this) Matters might be carried in this Dispute: But, if they were so, have we not Opportunity to see enough in the Conduct of each, to blame the Behaviour of both? In this Case, *St. Paul* saw the Errors of *Barnabas*; and *Barnabas* was not blind to the Errors of *St. Paul*: And each of them (if he would have reflected coolly) must have seen his own Errors. Had they done so (as every one is more concerned to enquire after his own Mistakes, than to censure those of others), their Behaviour to

each other must have been different: Each would have reproached himself more severely than the other could possibly do; and, consequently, each would have been more tender in censuring the other's Mistakes, than that other could allow himself to be. Not to insist, at present, that viewing the Actions of another Man in an imperfect Light, and tho' we see the outward Fact, yet, being great Strangers to the more secret Circumstances of the Agent,---we are unfit Judges concerning the Demerit of the Offender. This must be left to that supreme Arbiter, who sees through, and knows, all things; and will, after making all equitable Allowances, reward every Man according to his Works.

I have One Conclusion more to offer; and that is, By reflecting on the Dispute between those Two great Men, and that more general Point which it hath given me Occasion to remark, we ought to learn mutual Forbearance and Forgiveness of each other, in Cases of private Insult or Injury. The Contention between *St. Paul* and *Barnabas* was, as I have observed, *sharp*; and, in the Course of it, it is by no means improbable, that each might have said some things hard or injurious to the other. If it were so, each like-
wise

S E R M O N II. 69

wife had an Opportunity of showing, I will not say his *Humanity*, but his Christian Temper and Disposition. However, they parted, — each being too much warmed to settle again, till some time at least should pass: And then, no doubt, they returned to their old Affection, though the general Concerns of the Church never suffered them to come together afterwards.

On this Occasion we likewise should reflect, that, in Cases of the same Nature, we perhaps may be equally blameable; and, consequently, needing Forgiveness, in some degree, ourselves, should be ever ready to excuse or to forgive others: Or if, in any particular Dispute, our own Part should be entirely right, and we the only injured Side, yet we should look a little farther, and see whether, on some other Occasion, we may not need even Forgiveness from our Brother. Yet, be this as it will, the Consciousness of our own many Imperfections must shew, that we need at least Forgiveness from God; and with what Face can we implore this, if we are cruel and unmerciful to our Neighbour?

I shall close what I designed to offer at present, with these Words of the wise Son

70 S E R M O N II.

of Sirach; One Man beareth Hatred against another, and doth he seek Pardon from the Lord?—He sheweth no Mercy to Man, which is like himself,—and doth he ask Forgiveness of his own Sins? [Eccl. xxxviii. 3, 4.]

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S E R M O N III.

Reflections on the Dispute between
ST. PAUL and BARNABAS.

P A R T II.

ACTS xv. 39.

*And the Contention was so sharp between them,
that they departed asunder one from the other.*

IT was a Remark made by some of the ancient Heathens on the Conduct of the First Christians to one another, that they were united together in the strictest Bands of Friendship and Affection. And this was most certainly true as to the main; otherwise it would not have been acknowledged by their very Enemies themselves. Yet, that even this great Badge of Christianity was

72 S E R M O N III.

not so constantly worn by every one, as to admit no Exceptions to the general Character, may appear from the Instance now before us; in which Two of the earliest Propagators of our Faith (on an Occasion which of all others should have united them) differed from each other,---disputed,---grew warm, positive, inflexible; and, at length, carried Matters so far, as to separate from each other entirely. The Text says, *The Contention between them was so sharp, that they departed asunder one from the other: And then it follows, that Barnabas took Mark, and sailed to Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed.*

A deplorable Instance this of human Infirmary! That Two such excellent Persons as *St. Paul* and *Barnabas*,---Fellow-labourers and Associates in the Gospel, and equally zealous for the Success of it, should be so exceedingly sharpened against each other, as to be capable of no Measures of Accommodation,---is, in truth, just Matter of Wonder; and so much the more so, when we consider what might have proved the Consequence, if kind Providence had not prevented it; viz. The Hindrance of that Gospel, which each endeavoured with so much Earnestness to promote.

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S E R M O N III. 73

As these were Persons of high Distinction in the Christian Church, it might have happened, that each should have drawn to him a considerable Number of Followers. It would, in this Case, have been the Interest of each Side to endeavour the Support of itself at the Expence of the adverse Party. This would naturally have widened the Difference. The Difference, thus heightened, would have become Enmity: And an Enmity within the Bowels of the Church, must have been infinitely more prejudicial than any Opposition it could possibly meet with from abroad.—But God ordered it otherwise; and (as I shall have Occasion to note hereafter) promoted this Cause by those Means, which, in an human Way of thinking, might have proved its Ruin.

I have, in a former Discourse on these Words, taken Occasion to observe from hence, that the very best Men are liable to Infirmities. This Point I have prosecuted as distinctly as I then judged necessary; and shall now proceed to such farther Observations on this Piece of History, as do most naturally arise from it, and are of general Use in Life.

As my former Observation related to the
Imper-

74 S E R M O N III.

Imperfection of the general moral Character, even in the greatest and best of Men, it may not be amiss to carry my Reflections a little farther, and to note here, that there are some particular Infirmities to which each Man is more especially liable.

This likewise may be grounded on the History before us. For though the Contention between *St. Paul* and *Barnabas* be One Fact, and from its Nature equally blameable in both, yet the Causes which led to this Contention were different: In the one, it seems to have arisen from Jealousy, and an over-great Suspiciousness about the future Conduct of *Mark*; in the other, to have been owing to a Fondness for his Kinsman, and an unjustifiable Prejudice in his Favour. These are Errors of different Kinds, though the Effect produced by them were the same: And, probably, these were such Errors as each was more peculiarly exposed to.

In reference to *St. Paul*, we may collect something not only from this particular Story, but likewise from that Account which is elsewhere given concerning him; viz. In a Matter which he took to be religious, he was so *exceedingly mad* against the First Christians, *that he persecuted them even to strange Cities,*

S E R M O N III. 75

Cities. This was founded in Zeal: This Zeal made him jealous of every thing which might affect the Cause he had espoused; and this Jealousy, not being under exact Regulation, pushed him on to all the Extravagancies of religious Persecution. — Indeed, as we have shorter Accounts concerning *Bar-nabas*, we may not be able to collect his Temper from other Instances, in certain respects similar; yet, from the single Case now before us, we may conclude, with great Probability at least, that an Attachment to his near Relations, to *Mark* especially, was his principal Weakness; since we do not find he was ever drawn into any other Action exceedingly wrong; and since this cannot reasonably be imputed to any other Cause.

What is here observable in the Characters of these Two great Men, is but a Representation of what may be found, in a greater or less Degree, in all Men: For, as no one is perfectly righteous, so there is no Man entirely wicked either in Degree or Kind. Defective we are in every thing: But yet the very worst Men have some Qualities, of one sort or other, laudable; and the very best have some Infirmities, which are more especial Blemishes in their Characters.

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The Truth of this Observation might be confirmed both from the History of past Ages, and from our own daily Experience: But, as the producing Instances to this Purpose would be a Work endless, so the Attempt of doing it, in a Matter so well known, is needless. And therefore I shall just take the Liberty to remark, that upon the Presumption, or rather the acknowledged Certainty of this Truth, we proceed in forming the distinct Characters of Men. We say, one is covetous; another voluptuous; another ambitious; and another revengeful: By all which we do not mean, that the Persons so described are liable to no other Vices,---but only, that these respective Qualities have a more prevailing Influence on their Conduct;---are Principles, which act upon them more strongly, and solicit them more frequently, than others are wont to do; and, of consequence, are apt to determine them to more and greater Offences in *these* kinds than others.

It may be, and hath been farther remarked, that certain Ages of the World have been more especially addicted to certain Vices;---that particular Nations and People are, in this respect likewise, distinguished from others;---that some certain Qualities of an evil Sort prevail

S E R M O N III. 77

prevail more in one Climate than another;— that almost every Kind of Profession or Art betrays some peculiar moral Infirmary in those who undertake it;—and, lastly, that some more distinguishing Weaknesses are proper to the several Seasons of human Life. Thus Youth is inconsiderate and impetuous; the middle Age ambitious and enterprizing; and old Age, tenacious of what it possesses, and positive in what it determines. When these general Observations, founded on the Experience of all Ages, and conformable to our own most exact Notices;—when these, I say, are considered, we shall find less Occasion to endeavour the Confirmation of the Truth before us, by particular Instances. We may see it in the gross; and, therefore, a more minute Confirmation must be useless.

But, if this be fact, that every Man hath his own peculiar Infirmities, and is more exposed to the Commission of some Faults than of others,—it will become Matter of innocent Curiosity at least, and perhaps of Use, to enquire from whence such an unhappy Condition arises? The Solution of this Question (if it can be done to tolerable Satisfaction) will please the Inquisitive, and perhaps suggest such Reflections to the Serious, as may enable them

78 S E R M O N III.

them with more Success to strengthen their Weaknesses, and correct their own moral Disorders.

To say that this arises from the general Corruption of our Nature, derived to us from our First Parents, is to assign a Cause which, no doubt, hath had its Influence; because, from hence we become not only liable, but disposed to Sin: But then it may not be so easy, from this Principle alone, to account either for that Variety of Passions, in which some Men differ so much from others, —or indeed for that Peculiarity in the Constitution of particular Persons, which forms their distinct and proper Characters. Something, however, may be done this way, which I shall take the Liberty to suggest.

But, before I proceed, it may not be improper to demand, what is meant by Original Corruption? Because a just Sense of this will be serviceable in the present Question, as a wrong one will obscure at least, if not render it incapable of Solution.

By Original Corruption, therefore, we should here understand, such an Over-balance of the Affections, compared with the Understanding (which ought to be the ruling Faculty), and derived from the Sin of our
First

S E R M O N III. 79

First Parents, as hath broken the right Course of Things. By this the Operations of Reason are resisted in all Cases, and entirely hindered in many; so that actual Sin, even of the most heinous Nature, is from hence too frequently committed; and Defects in every Instance of moral Conduct become unavoidable.

We may observe farther, that, as Man consists of Two Parts, the Spiritual and the Animal, each of which hath its Affections proper to itself, so the Affections of the animal Part seem to have gained peculiar Strength under this Corruption. This may appear to be confirmed from Fact, when we observe how much the animal Affections do generally prevail, where they have not been corrected by the Discipline of Education, or the Watchfulness of improved Reason. And how this should come to pass will be easily conceived, by recollecting, that these Affections arising from the Constitution of the Body, that Change, which the First Sin might produce in the bodily Constitution, will give a rational Account of this Appearance.

From this State of the Matter it will be evident, that over-and-above that general
Infirmity

80 S E R M O N III.

Infirmity in moral Matters, which hath arisen from the Over-balance of the Affections in general, more especial Difficulties must arise in reference to the sensual Desires. These being more peculiarly heightened, must owe their chief Strength to that Cause which heightened them. And this may be sufficient to persuade us, that, in these Instances especially, the wrong Turn and Disposition of the Mind is greatly owing to this original Depravation.

Yet it must be acknowledged, that a remarkable Over-balance, even in the sensual Desires, doth not obtain universally. There are those, in whom little or nothing of this is seen; whole Nations (if Credit may be given to History) who maintain the Character of being temperate and modest; and this, notwithstanding the Disadvantage of the rudest Ignorance, and utmost Want of Discipline. Yet this will not prejudice the Account before given: For, as Accidents of many kinds may serve to heighten an original Corruption, so may they, on some Occasions, to correct it. Perhaps sometimes, by turning the Stream a particular Way, they may feed one Passion whilst they drain another; and so, by causing greater Iniquity in some kinds,

S E R M O N III. 81

kinds, may produce the Appearance of Innocence as to others.

After all, however this may be, and whether Men are particularly determined to any one kind of moral Disorder above others, by the original Pollution of our Nature, or not, —yet this Pollution is the general Source of every Iniquity; and so far all our wrong Affections must at last be resolved into it.

Over and above this, we may observe One great ruling Principle implanted in our Nature, and designed for noble Purposes, which, by a wrong Turn (and to this it is exceeding liable), will expose us to many Errors; and, by its Force, heighten the very Errors to which it exposeth us: I mean, Self-love, or that Desire of personal Good, without which no intelligent Being can subsist. This indeed, whilst rightly managed, is the Foundation of the greatest and best Actions; and, by applying to it the Supreme Being (if we duly attend to such Applications), keeps us back from the Commission of the worst. But this very same Principle, when its proper Object is mistaken, either through wrong Judgment, or a too hasty Consideration of things, hurries us on with Impetuosity, and is incapable of being controuled;

82 S E R M O N III.

till we feel the Mischief we thereby bring upon ourselves. The Principle, we see, is general, the Desire of Self-good : Its proper Object, in regard to Man, is the proper Good of Man : But that which it pursues in Fact, is the appearing Good : And what shall appear under that Character, will depend on a Variety of Accidents, too many to be here insisted on. If sensual Pleasure be the Object proposed, then Self-love makes a Man the more excessively Voluptuous : If Honour, he becomes the more insufferably Ambitious : If Wealth, he proves in the same proportion Covetous : If the Interests of others shall make them cross such Pursuits of his, then he will be transported with Anger : If disappointed, he will be Revengeful : If frequently interrupted in his Designs, Cruel ; so far, at least, as Power shall enable him to exercise his Cruelty. We see from hence, how this single Principle, differently applied, can put on any Appearance, and either create or increase in us almost every sort of moral Disorder. This however should be observed, that, as the Principle itself is general, so it is determined to particular Effects from other Causes : And therefore it will be necessary, in order to account for that Variety of different

S E R M O N III. 83

ferent Inclinations in different Men, to carry our Enquiries somewhat farther.

To this purpose it deserves our Remark, that each Person hath his particular Temperament of Body ; by which I mean, such a Proportion of the natural Qualities to each other, as in fact are found to produce, or at least to favour, a suitable Proportion of the Moral. Thus a Man in whom the Phlegm abounds, is slow and diffident ;---where the Blood circulates more briskly,---choleric and hasty ;---where the Spirits are low, melancholic ;---where lively, confident :---If unequally flowing, but oppressed in general, fretful ;---if high, but equal, then is he generally found easy and complying. It will be needless to mention more Particulars, which every one's Observation may suggest. And of all this a rational Account may be given : For as the Mind influences and governs the Body, in a certain Sense, and directs its several Motions, so the State of the Body determines the Exercise of these very Operations of the Mind ; the Union between them (though imperfectly understood by us) carrying a mutual Reference of each to the other ; and that which is properly the active Part, in this as well as other Instances, com-

84 S E R M O N III.

porting itself to the Nature and Condition of the passive.

Whence this particular Temperament of the Body may arise, is another Question, and not so easily to be solved. To this many Accidents may contribute: But that which is most obvious, and apt to strike us, is, that this Temperament is often found to follow the Condition and Complexion of the Parent; and so the wrong Dispositions of the Mind seem to be propagated much in the same way, as other Diseases or Infirmities of the Body. But whatever be the Cause of this Appearance, whether that I have now mentioned, or any other, the Thing itself is certain Fact, and cannot be otherwise, that the moral Temper will be highly influenced by the natural.

The Causes before-mentioned are sometimes found to gather Strength from the Want of Education; and wrong Methods in the Management of Education, do likewise create Disorders of the moral Kind, which would not otherwise have appeared.

In reference to the former, it is observable, that Man doth not (as other Creatures do) come to the perfect Use of his most distinguishing Faculties within a short Space of

S E R M O N III. 85

Time,—nor improve in these proportionably to the Growth of his other Powers. So far from it, that the animal get the Start of the rational Powers; and so, of course, the Affections which arise from the animal Part, gather Strength much faster than Improvements can possibly be made in Reason. To obviate the Difficulties which arise from hence, there is great Need of Art. The Luxuriances of the animal Growth must be checked betimes: The First springing Seeds of Virtue must be cherished: The Good must be distinguished and separated from the Bad: Every thing capable of an useful Turn, must be bent the right Way: And by these means the several Powers of the animal Nature prepared not only to obey, but to forward likewise, the Directions of Reason. This is the proper Design of Education; and this will be the Effect of it, when rightly managed, and carried on with Diligence. But where nothing of this is attempted, there all the foregoing Causes of moral Disorder have their full Force: And as many Years must pass, before Reason is capable of doing any thing tolerably towards fixing the moral Rule, or enforcing its Precepts, Passion, in the mean while, fixes its Empire, and will not be dis-

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possessed,

86 S E R M O N III.

possessed. The particular Inclinations, which have been most favoured by the Complexion of the Body, become settled and strong Habits; upon every Occasion which offers they exert themselves, and push him on to correspondent Actions; and, if they do not render Amendment impossible, do, at least, make it a Work of extreme Labour and Difficulty.

And yet, bad as this is, a wrong Education will often be found of worse Consequence than none. Where there is no Education, there corrupt Nature alone works, and does its own Business: But where wrong Methods are taken, there to *Bad* something *Worse* is added. The evil Dispositions which were original, are made more evil by Encouragement; and, as it sometimes happens, new Principles of moral Disorder are inserted: So that whilst bad Qualities are rendered still worse by being cherished,---even the good may be rendered evil by Perversion.

To the Causes before alleged, several others likewise may be subjoined. Thus, the very Food we take in,---the Air we breathe,---the Climate under which we live,---and the Nature and Constitution of the Country we inhabit, by influencing the Body, give a particular

S E R M O N III. 87

particular Turn to the Mind ; either produce Dispositions, which, under different Circumstances, might never have appeared,--- or, by favouring those, which are in some sense original, carry them to an Height to which they might never otherwise have risen. But, beyond this, general Practice (from what Cause soever this Practice may arise), will have a mighty Weight, on several Accounts, easy to be conceived. Men care not to be singular, nor to expose themselves to the Reflections or light Wit of those they converse with ; and so are led, through Complaisance, or false Modesty, into Actions they did not at first approve. Even the seeing things commonly practised by others without Shame or Regret, lessens the Dislike they once had to them : By growing familiar, they become indifferent : A little Practice makes them agreeable : Dispositions are gradually improved into Habits : And Habits, once confirmed, are difficult to be corrected. So that, in this Way, moral Evil is spread from one to another, as effectually as natural Diseases are by Contagion ; and those who were heretofore barely susceptible of Infection, by becoming corrupt themselves, help forward the general Disorder, and contribute their

88 S E R M O N III.

Shares likewise to perpetuate an Evil it is every one's real Interest to restrain. We may add to all these Causes, that the particular kinds of Life Men follow;—the Professions they enter into;—the incidental Circumstances which may attend them in their several Courses;—the being too much acquainted with the World, or too little;—the being prosperous, or the being unfortunate;—with many other Particulars, more easy to be noted by a careful Observer than distinctly reckoned up:—I say, any of these may serve to give the Mind a wrong Turn; may check the Growth of a good Principle, or cherish and promote a bad one; and in this way may be esteemed Sources of those moral Infirmities, to which each Man is, in a greater or less Degree, subject.

But now, if we look back, and consider the numberless Difficulties which beset us in our moral Course, together with the Necessity of getting over those Difficulties, it is not to be wondered, if a weak Thinker should be tempted to judge hardly of Providence. Why (may he possibly say) are we placed in such Circumstances, as render the complete Discharge of Duty impossible,---and even a tolerable Degree of moral Perfection, difficult?

Or,

S E R M O N III. 89

Or, if this may be accounted for, yet why are the Penalties of Disobedience so great, where the Dangers which Men run of falling into Disobedience are so numerous? On such Terms as these, a wrong-judging and low-spirited Person may be apt to conclude, that it were better for us if we had not been born.

All Reflections on the Conduct of Providence must be guarded against most carefully, from whatever Cause they may arise: And, therefore, it will not be amiss to consider this Difficulty, and to attempt some rational Account of this Appearance.

To this Purpose I would observe, First, That the present Constitution of Things could not be otherwise than it is, consistently with the Wisdom and moral Government of Providence: And, Secondly, That much hath been done, by the extraordinary Interposition of God, towards setting these several moral Disorders at rights. If these things are made appear, the Strength of the Objection will vanish; and whatever shall become of Man, through his own Folly and Perverseness, God will be found *righteous in all his Ways, and holy in all his Works.*

When I say, the present Constitution could
not

90 S E R M O N III.

not be otherwise than it is, consistently with the Wisdom and moral Government of Providence, I mean, so far as Providence itself is concerned in this Constitution: For, if Man be in any respect the Author of his own Misfortune, he can so far blame no one but himself.

Now the present Constitution hath arisen partly from the voluntary Acts of Man, and partly from the Operation of those general Laws which were originally fixed in the natural World: From considering both which, we shall find ample Matter to justify the Proceedings of Providence.

In reference to the voluntary Acts of Man himself, it is clear at first Sight (and I have noted it just before), that where his moral Infirmities have arisen from some wrong Conduct of his own,--from something which he might and ought to have avoided, there no Blame can be laid on the general Constitution, or the Administrations of Divine Providence. But it may be thought, that in other Cases, where the Difficulties have arisen from something out of his own Power, there is an Appearance at least of Hardship: For why should he suffer where he cannot be justly blamed?

Be

S E R M O N III. 91

Be this a Case of Hardship ; yet it ought not to be charged to the Account of Providence, if the Hardship did not arise from an Act of Providence, and were such as could not properly be prevented. Thus, for Instance ; What hath arisen in this regard, either by the Neglect, or wrong Management, of Education,—from evil Example,—or from those Temptations to Sin, which one Man lays in the Way of another ?—These Effects must all of them be charged to their proper Causes ; and, in the Course of Providence, could not be prevented *absolutely*, without such an overbearing Influence on the Wills of Men, as must destroy their Liberty : And if, by destroying Liberty, much moral Evil might indeed be prevented, we should note withal, that much moral Good would be prevented likewise ; because, on that foot, Virtue would be entirely destroyed ;—there being no Virtue where there is no Liberty.

What hath been here said may serve likewise to justify the Conduct of Providence, in reference to that great and general Source of moral Infirmary ;—I mean, Original Corruption. This hath arisen from our Relation to one common Parent, who, by the Abuse of Liberty having corrupted his own Nature,
must,

92 S E R M O N III.

must, according to the settled Course of Things, transmit a like Corruption to those who are descended from him: But, could this First Error be prevented, on the Part of Providence, without such an Interposition as was unworthy of Providence? Must not the First Man, as well as all others who have succeeded him, be left so far to himself, as to be properly a moral Agent? And if the Consequence of his Misbehaviour was so extensive, this indeed was an Aggravation of his Crime: But Providence will be clear all the while; since it neither caused nor contributed to his Error,—and could not, agreeably with the Rules of moral Government, prevent it.

This, perhaps, may not, of itself, be satisfactory to every one. It may be said, admitting that nothing ought to be done, in this or any other Case, inconsistent with human Liberty, yet how comes it to pass, that the Actions of One Man have so much Influence on the moral Good and Perfection of another? If it be said, This cannot be otherwise in the present Constitution of Things, may not the Complainer object; That, upon this Supposition, the Constitution itself is wrong; — and allege, That it ought at length to be corrected,

S E R M O N. III. 93

rected,—or its Operations over-ruled, in those Cases from which so much Mischief flows.

That all was originally right, should be concluded from the perfect Goodness and Wisdom of the Creator: And that the present Administration of Providence is right, ought to be concluded from the same Reasons, be Appearances how they will at present, and though our short Reason should be unable to clear things up distinctly. Thus we ought in Modesty to argue: But, since Men will not keep within these Bounds, they should be reminded, that Man being a rational Animal, he ought to be treated by an All-wise Governor as such; *i. e.* as a Being essentially compounded of Two Parts, which have a mutual Reference to each other. This mutual Reference consists in this; That the rational Part shall operate upon and move the animal, and the animal limit and determine, in some sort, the Operations of the rational. Hence arises the Influence of the Body on the Soul; and, of consequence, the moral Corruption hitherto insisted on.—But “this should be corrected,” it seems.—How?—Not by settling new Laws of Nature: For, those which now obtain, having been once fixed by infinite Wisdom, any others would be

be imperfect, and less answer the great Ends intended to be produced by them.---Not by over-ruling these, in order to prevent the wrong Effects now produced under them: For this must be, in effect, the same as to change these Laws themselves.---Not by altering the whole Frame of Man, and producing a new Sort of Being in the same State in which the First happy Pair subsisted: This would be strictly a new Creation: It would be to destroy one Race of rational Creatures, and supply it by another; and, consequently, not properly to mend the old Creature, but to make a new one.

Let us suppose, that the present moral Condition of the World is unfortunate enough,--especially if compared with the original State of Man, when he came out of his Creator's Hands. Yet our Condition is not so very bad, as to need such an Alteration of the human Race. Moral Perfection (and consequently the Happiness resulting from it) is not utterly destroyed. Men are still capable of making great Advances this way, even during the present Life, and of completing all in another State hereafter.

To this Purpose it will be much for our Comfort to reflect, that notwithstanding the
Supreme

S E R M O N III. 95

Supreme Being hath not judged proper to take those Measures, which the Minds of weak Men may possibly suggest to them, yet, by extraordinary Interpositions, much hath been done to help frail Man, and to set his several moral Disorders at rights. Thus, in order to assist his Understanding in reference to the Rule of Duty itself, God hath been pleased to reveal his Will to us, by Persons extraordinarily appointed by him : To influence the Will, He hath annexed the highest Sanctions, eternal Happiness and Misery : To remedy what is past, He hath prepared an Atonement of infinite Value, by the Death of his own beloved Son : To engage us still farther, He hath proposed to us the most excellent and lovely Pattern of Duty : To make the Imitation of this great Example more easy, He hath prescribed to us a Course of Discipline in the Christian Institution : And still, to help us farther, He is ever ready, by his Grace, to suggest to us the best Thoughts ;---to strengthen in us the best Resolutions ;---to animate us in every difficult Conflict ;---to comfort us under every heavy Distress ;---in short, to guide us through all Life ;---and to support us under the Apprehensions and Terrors of Death. And is not
all

96 S E R M O N III.

all this of as great Moment, as any thing weak Man can propose on the Occasion ? If the several Difficulties we now labour under were removed, and Man subsisted at present in the same Condition with our First Parents before the Fall,---yet this would not infallibly secure us against Sin. The First Man fell, though he was once innocent ; and any one else, in the same Condition, must run the same Risk he did : For the present Life is but a State of Trial ; and the Nature of such a State carries with it a Possibility of falling. But, fallen as we are, it is still, we see, in our own Power to rise again, by using those Helps which God hath been pleased to give us : And therefore, instead of needlessly complaining of our Condition, and throwing away the Advantages before us, we should endeavour to make the most of them ; and so, by gradually growing better, and correcting our several moral Infirmities, we shall be enabled at last to present ourselves to God *an holy Offering, and well-pleasing in his Sight.*

After all that hath been said, the Circumstances of Mankind, during the present State of Things, are unfavourable enough. Tho' we are aided by Providence in our moral and religious

S E R M O N III. 97

religious Course (without which we could not proceed with Advantage), yet it is some sort of Unhappiness that we have wanted these very Aids : And the Degrees and Measures in which they are vouchsafed to us, though sufficient to save us, through the Divine Mercy, and our right Use of them, yet will not make us entirely perfect here, nor bring us back to that very Point from which our First Parent set out : Nay, which is more, the several different Circumstances of Mankind render it unavoidable, but there will be different Advances made towards moral Perfection, by Persons equally sincere : And so, when we enter upon another State, as we shall be found to have made a different Progress, so the Happiness immediately resulting from it will be proportionable. Yet still we may hope, --- I think, be confident, that the good Man, even of the lowest Class, shall not stop there, nor continue eternally in the same poor, but tolerable Degree of Perfection. It is much more reasonable to believe, that the State of good Men in the other World will be a progressive State, secure indeed from all Danger of their falling back, and so losing either their Virtue or Happiness ; --- secure likewise of being gradually

98 S E R M O N III.

dually improved by farther Advances in Virtue, and, of consequence, by greater Accessions of Reward. If this be true, the Difficulty before us is solved. We are all of us still capable of those highest Degrees of Happiness, in some Part or other of our eternal Existence, of which any created Being is capable: For, if the State of good Men in the next Life shall be progressive, there is no Degree of Happiness, how great soever, if FINITE, but may and will be attained by that Being, who is always aspiring after it, and perpetually moving towards it.

What a most noble Prospect is here opened to our View! By looking forward we may discern not only an End put to all the Inconveniencies of our present Condition, but that great Point regained which seemed to be lost by the Fault of our Progenitor. For, God having put us in the Way, we shall still go on from Strength to Strength, and from Glory to Glory, through the whole Extent of our Being, even through endless Ages.

Having said thus much in Justification of Providence on this Occasion, there still remains One Thing farther to be done on this Subject; *viz.* To suggest such present Remedies for the Correction of our several
moral

S E R M O N III. 99

moral Infirmities, as Providence hath placed within our Reach, and may be used with sure Prospect of Success.

Now the First which offers, and is indeed necessary to prepare the Way for all the rest, ---is, to examine carefully what our several Infirmities are : For, as particular Disorders will always require a particular Application, so it is impossible to do any thing effectual this way, till we first know what the Disorder is we are concerned to obviate. If indeed our Corruption were only general, no one prevailing above another ; and if this Corruption proceeded from one single Cause, the Case were different : The Root of our Distempers would be apparent ; and our only Concern, to apply properly to that Principle from which all our Disorders flow. But since, over and above a general Indisposition, as to the perfect Discharge of Duty, there are particular Disorders which every one feels more or less ; and since these vary according to the Condition and Circumstances of each particular Person, surely every one is concerned to examine his own Case minutely. The Necessity of proceeding in this Way is so apparent, that, in all other Cases, it is discovered by every one, and, I may add,

100 S E R M O N III.

PRACTISED by every one, who makes Pretences to common Discretion. But shall a Care which is so generally used in Matters of less Concern,---in Matters relating either to our temporal Circumstances, or the Preservation of bodily Health, be neglected, where our most important Interests are at Stake; and where the Happiness of this Life, and the Hopes of a better, are so dependent? Each Man, therefore, should frequently examine himself most strictly;---should note all his particular Dispositions;---how they operate on emergent Occasions;---and what Temptations have most prevailed, or proved most urgent. This will let him into a just View of his spiritual Condition: By this he will discern what are his weakest Sides, and where it concerns him to lay in most ample Matter of Defence.

Having in this Way discovered what are his chiefest moral Infirmities, it will be proper, in the next Place, by Reading,---by Meditation,---and, if need be, by consulting those who are able to instruct him best,---to furnish his Mind with such Principles and Considerations, as are most useful in his Condition. There are general Points, which, having their proper Influence on all others
sub-

S E R M O N III. 101

subordinate to them, ought not to be neglected : But these, without something else, will be ineffectual ; because (as was observed before) particular Disorders must be applied to in a particular Way. Thus, to consider that we are Creatures of the Almighty Power, ---dependent on God in every Moment of our Being, ---and accountable to him for every Action we perform,---are general Reflections, of Use, no doubt ; but which, having an equal Regard to every Instance of moral Behaviour, can be of special Service in none. As to the Case now before us, those Principles are to be chiefly sought, which are pointed at our own particular Disorders ; and those Considerations to be treasured up, and thoroughly digested by us, which are most likely to move the Will, and to influence the Affections, in the Particulars which most expose us to Error. These are our proper Armour and Materials of Defence. Without these, the Enemy of Mankind (for we should remember that the Evil Being is ever watchful for our Destruction ;---I say, the Enemy of Mankind) finding us unprepared, will double his Assaults ; and, notwithstanding our general Resolutions of Amendment in our more solemn and serious

Discourse

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Hours,

102 S E R M O N III.

Hours, will return upon us with his wonted Success, and *make our latter End still worse than our Beginning*: Whereas, by thoroughly considering what our Wants are, and supplying ourselves with those moral and religious Considerations which are most suited to our Wants, we shall be provided against all Events: The Force of the most dangerous Temptations will be weakened in proportion as our own moral Weakness is strengthened; and, by the Grace of God (which will ever concur with our own sincere Endeavours), we shall gradually get the better of all the Powers of Darkness.

I have just hinted, that the Enemy of Mankind is ever watchful for our Destruction; and therefore, as he notes and observes our several Infirmities, he will apply to them by all the Arts of Subtlety, and when we are least apt to suspect the Fraud. This should keep us always upon our Guard: For surely we have, at least, as much Concern to preserve ourselves from Ruin, as our Enemy can possibly have to procure it.—As much, do I say? An infinitely greater; because our Enemy, by his very Success, makes his own Case but so much the worse, and treasures up, against himself, greater Wrath
against

S E R M O N III. 103

against the Day of Wrath. Watchful then we should be; and so much the more so, as, being conscious how often we have fallen, we must be apprehensive how likely we are to fall again. In consequence of this, we should, in all those Instances at least, be ever suspicious of the worst. Whenever such a Suspicion arises, we should carefully look about us. The good Principles we have treasured up being then most likely to be of Use, we should recollect them with Care,--- we should dwell on them with Pleasure,--- and, if need be, apply them with Diligence. The whole Force and Vigour of our Minds should be then exerted, when the whole Force of our spiritual Enemy is employed against us: And as the Contention, in regard to Us, is so vastly important,---since a Victory may regain and secure to us the Possession of our lost Powers, or a Defeat enslave us still farther, every thing, which can be done by us, should be done. The Conflict may indeed be difficult: Yet here we have Principles to support us, which will make us superior to all Difficulties:---The Almighty Judge of Worth looking on; and favouring and encouraging us in our Struggles;---*A Crown of Righteousness, which fadeth not away,*

104 S E R M O N III.

as it were, reached out to our View, and offered as the Reward of our Labours; and whilst we are striving, in earnest, to do our best, and to obtain this Crown, we shall see, by the Eye of Faith, Angels themselves assisting us, and feel an inward Divine Influence upon our Minds. Such will be the Case of every Man, who, having duly prepared himself beforehand, is at length called forth to abide his Tryal, and to shew himself.

I shall only add one Method more, of great Service in order to correct our several moral Infirmities;---and that is, to endeavour, in every way we can, to implant in ourselves Habits contrary to those which are most apt to lead us into Sin. The First Step this way will be to avoid Temptations: And, methinks, no one should be adventurous in this regard, who must be conscious to himself how often Temptations have formerly got the better of him. But neither will this be sufficient of itself; For though a Man should neither create to himself any dangerous Tryal, nor keep in the Way where he may honestly decline it, yet, in this great Variety of Things, it will be *impossible but Offences will come*: And, since they must
come,

S E R M O N III. 105

come, we cannot surely but reckon it a great Happiness, by Care and Discipline, to have got so much the better of ourselves, as to have rooted out, in a good degree, those wrong Tendencies which have formerly betrayed us. But how can this be done?—In the same Way in which many of these Tendencies were produced.—By Practice: By repeating things contrary to our former Habits; and persisting in them so long, that at length the Mind itself is, as it were, bent by them,—pursues them with Pleasure,—and cannot be diverted from them without Pain and Difficulty. This may be done. Reason will assure us of it from the very Nature of Things; and, God be thanked! there are not wanting many engaging Instances of this, which we shall be induced to imitate, if we look about us, and consider them with Attention. This, I must confess, is carrying the Matter as far as we can hope to carry it during the present Life: And, therefore, I have mentioned this Method last, and as perfective of those already mentioned. But let us not stop short of it. The former Methods will prepare the Way, and make the present Course more easy: Our own Resolutions, formed on the best Reasons, and invigorated

106 S E R M O N III.

gorgated by the best Motives, must add Force to our Attempts : And (what should never be out of our Thoughts) the Divine Grace (always ready to succour the Willing) will crown these noble Endeavours with Success. The Event of all will, and must be, this: After having done, or endeavoured to do, to the utmost of our Power, the Will of God, and having passed through our present State of Tryal, we shall be removed into a better World ; and there shall perfect in Glory that which we began in Weakness.

S E R -

S E R M O N I V.

The Doctrine of CHRIST's Satisfaction agreeable with Reason.

ON GOOD FRIDAY.

I PETER iii. 18.

For Christ also hath once suffered for Sins, the Just for the Unjust, that he might bring us to God.

WE are admonished, by this Day's Solemnity, to consider with a due Attention the Sufferings and Death of Christ; which Sufferings and Death were not merely the Consequences of Divine Permission, --- but fore-ordained of God; in order to bring about the greatest and most merciful Design,

It

108 S E R M O N IV.

It was the original Intention to communicate to Man such a Proportion of Happiness, as he should qualify himself for by his own proper Conduct: And had this Design been pursued by us (as it ought and might have been), there would have been no Occasion for new and extraordinary Measures. But, as God foresaw this favoured Creature would soon corrupt himself, and by that means forfeit all Title to intended Favours, He determined upon a suitable Provision: He ordained that his own Son should appear in the Flesh, to make Atonement for our Sins: And hence He is in Holy Scripture styled, *The Lamb slain from the Foundation of the World.* [Rev. xiii. 8.]

This, I maintain, is the true Christian Doctrine; and this Doctrine, as it must be our great Comfort to have always before us, so is it the most proper Subject of this Day's Meditation; when the Church calls upon us to bring into our most serious Thoughts what our Blessed Lord hath done,—what Difficulties he went through,—what Contradictions he bore,—what Labours he sustained,—what Pains he endured,—and what Death he suffered: And all this not for himself, or any Demerit of his own, but purely on our Account,

S E R M O N IV. 109

Account,---as our great Substitute or Representative, to satisfy the Demands of Justice, ---to restore Dignity to Law,---and to save poor ruined Creatures.

The whole Subject is too great to be brought within the Compass of One Discourse. I shall therefore consider a single Branch of it, and enquire at present, What Foundation the Doctrine before us hath in the Nature and Reason of the Thing.

It is readily allowed, that the Doctrine of a Satisfaction actually made for Sin, and particularly of its being made by Christ, is Matter of pure Revelation ; and, as such, incapable of being evinced directly by the Conclusions of human Reason. I am not therefore so absurd as to attempt a direct Proof of the Point from thence. My Design is this only ; To enquire whether natural Light may not prepare us to admit such a Doctrine ; whether we may not conclude the Expediency, and even Necessity, of some Satisfaction, in order to the Pardon of Sin ; and, consequently, whether there be any Foundation for that bold Affirmation of certain Writers, That the Doctrine of the Catholic Church, on this Head, is absurd and impossible.

And

110 S E R M O N IV.

And this I conceive the more proper to be done, because no Proofs pretended to be alleged from Scripture, can be of any Weight against plain, common Sense. The Way must be cleared here, before such Evidence hath a Right to be considered. Particular Difficulties may be examined afterwards, and overpowered by Scripture Evidence: But the Thing must appear to be possible, at least all Appearance of Impossibility must be removed, before we consider the Testimonies in its Favour; because all Testimonies alleged, must otherwise be rejected immediately, on account of an Absurdity in the Thing itself,--- or else receive some other Interpretation more agreeable to Reason,

Now the Substance of what natural Reason teaches, concerning the Subject before us, may be reduced to the following Propositions:

- I. Every Man, upon the Commission of Sin, apprehends and dreads some Punishment, which he is conscious that Sin deserves.
- II. That Punishment which Sin deserves, God may, as Supreme Governor of the World, inflict; and this may be done without Inconsistency with any of the Divine Attributes.
- III. As

S E R M O N IV. III

III. As God may, consistently with the Divine Attributes, inflict Punishment for Sin, so the Reasons of his moral Government seem to require he should inflict it; unless some Way be found to repair the Injury done by Sin to the Cause of Virtue, and the Authority of God.

IV. Man, of himself, is incapable of doing any thing sufficient to repair the Mischief which his Sin hath caused; and therefore, on this Foot only, he must remain without Comfort, and without Hope. But,

V. Notwithstanding this, a Persuasion hath always obtained, that God will forgive Sin; and, consequently, that some Method hath been contrived (whatever that Method be) whereby such Forgiveness may be vouchsafed, consistently with the Regard owing to the Interest of Virtue, and the Divine Dignity. And,

LASTLY, That the Doctrine concerning Satisfaction for Sin by the Death of Christ, doth fully and most unexceptionably answer this Purpose: From whence it follows, that the Doctrine is from its own Nature credible, and readily to be embraced, upon sufficient Authority of Holy Scripture. And,

112 S E R M O N IV.

I. Every Man, upon the Commission of Sin, apprehends and dreads some Punishment, which he is conscious that Sin deserves.

This is Matter of Fact, and experienced by every one, in proportion as he understands the Nature of Right and Wrong, and reflects on his own proper Conduct. It seems to have been originally founded on the moral Agency of Man;---on the Power he enjoys over his own Actions, and his Discernment of their proper Rule; and therefore, as it extends itself to all those Cases, in which he was capable of doing what he is conscious he ought to do, so it cannot reach him where he is ignorant of the Rule,---or incapable of obeying it,----- or, for want of Reflection, knows not in what particular he hath erred.

It would be a going too far back, to prove that there is a real Difference in Actions; and that some are fit to be performed by us, whilst others are unfit and improper. This I must suppose at present; and observe, that, upon this Foot, a reasonable Creature (as Man is) cannot but approve the Right in Action, and disapprove the Wrong. By this means, without attending to other Considerations, he forms to himself a Rule. Whilst he observes
this

S E R M O N IV. 113

this Rule, a Serenity and Satisfaction of Mind arises; and as certain an Uneasiness follows the Breach of it.

But yet even this, of itself, is insufficient for the Support of Virtue. Religion must come in to its Aid,---a Belief of some superior Power, and of some future Reward, or Punishment. Without this, the moral Rule being of Man's own forming, he will follow it just so far as he is inclined: And if the present Profit or Pleasure of Sin shall overbalance the Uneasiness which it occasions, what Reason can he have rather to chuse the Right than Wrong? especially since, on this Supposition, what is right for others may, as to himself, prove wrong.

But Providence, which saw this, hath not left Virtue without a better and stronger Enforcement. The Man who does ill, and is dissatisfied with himself for doing so, is conscious likewise that he deserves every bad Effect of his Conduct. In consequence of this, he is ever suspicious that some Evil may happen unto him, and (which is worse) afraid lest it will happen. Even those who have pretended to disbelieve any Superior Being, have yet been unable to get over these Ter-

114 S E R M O N I V.

rors: Their own guilty Minds have frequently suggested to them some future Misery, as the Punishment of their Guilt.

Two Ways indeed have been pursued by different Persons, in order to make themselves easy under these Circumstances; the one, by endeavouring to suppress their Reason;---the other, to pervert it: But neither hath succeeded fully.

That inward Principle, which teaches Men what is right or wrong, cannot be entirely extinguished. It will shew itself upon some Occasions. And as a Man cannot but reflect sometimes, and see the Irregularity of his Conduct, so he cannot but dread the Consequences which he is sensible his Sin deserves. He may endeavour indeed to avoid himself,----to prevent all Attention to the moral Rule, and Reflection upon his own past Actions: He may follow a thousand idle Amusements and Diversions; run from one to another; and, when they do not readily offer, he may search after, and even create them. But still Time will hang upon his Hands. Company cannot always be had: Or, if it might, yet this cannot always entertain alike: And perhaps his very Com-
pany

S E R M O N IV. 115

pany may sometimes incline to the serious ; and so occasion the Return of those very Sentiments it was intended to prevent.

And as these Operations of Reason cannot be wholly extinguished, so neither can they be entirely perverted. Men have endeavoured, and (I am afraid) daily do endeavour, to reason themselves out of Religion ; to explode the Superintendency of Providence,---the Being of a God,---and the very Distinction of moral Good and Evil : Yet have we no Ground to think that any such Scheme of absolute Unbelief hath ever been thoroughly embraced. Men may bring themselves to doubt of many things, by making unreasonable Abatements in the Arguments on one side, and giving undue Force to Objections on the other. This may be done in some Cases, but cannot be done in all : Or, if it could, yet this very State of Doubt itself, though it may lessen, yet cannot entirely remove Terror. He who thinks there *may* be a God, thinks there *may* be a Power irresistible. If there *may* be a Providence, then he *may* be accountable for his Actions : If there *may* be a real Distinction between Good and Evil, then he can have no Grounds to explode such a Distinction.---

116 S E R M O N IV.

But to suppose the most : Let us imagine, that the Infidel we are considering, is not merely a Sceptic : Let us imagine, that, by giving an odd Train to his Thoughts, he hath worked himself into some sort of Persuasion, that the whole of Religion is groundless : Yet, is he sure of continuing always in these Sentiments ? Is he capable of demonstrating, that there is no Foundation of moral and religious Obligation ? If not, then the Terrors before-mentioned *may* return ; and, upon every Occasion which suggests serious Thoughts, they *will* return : For they are deeply rooted in our Nature ; and what is natural, cannot entirely be mastered.

After all, what is most pernicious to Virtue, and apt to disappoint the proper Effects of natural Conscience, is Superstition, --- a Retaining the Pretence and Shew of Religion, but a Corrupting it in such a manner, as to make it serve the real Interests of Vice : And this is done, either by mistaking its Precepts, ---or by altering its Sanctions,---or by substituting something else, as an Equivalent for that Virtue we are concerned to practise.

Here I have a wide Field of Discourse, would my present Design allow me to pursue those Points fully : But I am obliged
to

S E R M O N IV. 117

to consider them in One View only; and none otherwise than as they relate to the natural Apprehensions of Duty and Sin, and the consequent Fears of Punishment.

Now, in this respect, *that* Superstition which defeats the Purposes of Religion, supposes, and is founded in, these natural Apprehensions and Terrors. Its Design is to guard against them; and in the very Method of doing this, it confirms them. If it be well examined, it will appear, that no Men are subject to greater Terrors than the Superstitious: The Fears of their own creating are added to those which Nature implanted in them; which they would avoid, but cannot; and which, by endeavouring to avoid, they do, in some respects, heighten: So that, in whatever Situation we consider Man, he will be found to have this Sentiment deeply rooted in him; That the Wicked deserves to suffer; that these Sufferings, though deferred for the present, may, and probably will, some time or other, happen; and for which, when they do happen, he can blame no one but his own foolish Self.

II. The next Step I am to take in the Argument before me, is this; God, as Supreme Governor of the World, may, if he pleases,

118 S E R M O N IV.

inflict that Punishment which we are conscious our Sins deserve ; and this may be done without the least Inconsistency with the Divine Attributes.

All Punishment, rightly inflicted, necessarily supposes some Law and Government ; and the inflicting it is indeed one of the principal Acts of Government. In a State of Nature no Punishment can be inflicted by Man : Not, that Punishment may not be deserved even in such a State ; --- but because, all Men being supposed equal and independent, no Man hath any Right to controul another : And whatever Severities may perhaps be used, if rightly used at all, they must rather be considered as Acts of Self-defence, than Instances of Punishment ; and, therefore, are intended not so much to animadvert on what is past, as to prevent the like for the future. Punishment then can be justly inflicted by none but a Governor ; and where-ever such a Governor is, there must likewise be a Right to inflict it. His very Authority supposes such a Right, without which he would cease to be a Governor at all. This is the principal, and indeed the most forcible, Sanction of Law. The Fitness and Propriety of the Thing may constitute a Rule, and
make

S E R M O N IV. 119

make the Observation of that Rule a Point of Prudence : But, unless some Punishment shall follow the Violation, it will be considered none otherwise than a Rule still, which a Man may disregard or observe, as he himself pleases. In short, it is plain, where there is Government, there must be Law ; and where there is Law, there must be a Right to enforce that Law ; which Enforcement arising chiefly from its penal Sanctions, it follows, there must be a Right in the Supreme Governor to execute these Sanctions.

And this shews how well grounded those Terrors are, which have been insisted on under the former Head : For if, from the Reason of the Thing, Men can form to themselves a Rule ;---if they naturally censure and condemn themselves for violating this Rule ;---if they are conscious they deserve to suffer, as often as they violate it ;---if the same Reason teaches them, that a watchful Governor oversees their Actions, and hath a Right to punish them, when they deserve it ; then it cannot be otherwise but the Offender must dread this Punishment ;---must be ever apprehensive, that it is hanging over him, and ready to be discharged upon him. As these are the pure Dictates

120 S E R M O N IV.

of Nature, so are they likewise confirmed by every serious Reflection.

But, it seems, a Writer hath arisen, who would advance a quite different Scheme. He hath pretended indeed to allow a real Difference between moral Good and Evil, and contended, in his way, for a Just, and Wise, and Good Governor of all things: But then, instead of deducing the Consequence before-mentioned, he would advance something directly opposite; and his Way of Reasoning is this:

“ All Punishment, for Punishment sake, is mere Cruelty and Malice, which can never be in God; nor can He hate any thing he hath made,—or be subject to such Weakness or Impotence as to act arbitrarily, or out of Spite, Wrath, or Revenge, or any Self-interest: And, consequently, whatever Punishment he inflicts, must be a Mark of his Love, in not suffering his Creatures to remain in that miserable State, which is inseparable from Sin and Wickedness*.” To which the same Writer adds, on another Occasion, “ That Punishment hath never a Retrospect (for what is past cannot be recalled) but is designed only to prevent the

* Vide *Christianity as Old, &c.* p. 42.

like

S E R M O N IV. 121

like for the future *.” In this latter Passage he hath explained himself fully: For affirming, that Punishment hath no Retrospect, and assigning this Reason for his Assertion, [because what is past cannot be recalled] he plainly denies that any Punishment, properly so called, can be inflicted at all. The very Nature of Punishment consists in this; That it is an Evil suffered on account of an Evil done. It must, therefore, have a Retrospect; and, if no such Retrospect ought to be, then there can be no Right to punish.

It is true, this Writer allows, that Punishment may be designed to prevent the like Offences for the future; and, as such, it is a Mark of God's Love in not suffering his Creatures to remain in the miserable State of Sin. But even this carries us back to the Consideration of some former Offence. For he doth not affirm merely, that it is designed “to prevent future Sin,” but “to prevent the like Offence for the future.” Yet here he doth not distinguish sufficiently between Punishment and Discipline. The latter is intended indeed to recover us out of a bad State, and to train us up to Virtue: And this it doth, by driving us off from Vice, and

* *Second Address*, p. 2.

inuring

122 S E R M O N IV.

inuring us to the contrary Practice. But what is properly Punishment, is not so much designed to restore Men to a good State, as to prevent their falling into a bad one. Punishment is the Sanction of Law, and threatened in order to secure Obedience to it; which, if Men will incur notwithstanding, it will be vain to allege [What is past cannot be recalled]; That, which cannot now be recalled, might once have been prevented; and that which Men would not prevent when they might, they deserve to suffer for, when it is out of their Power to recall it.

To aid these Remarks, I would consider a Consequence which must arise from the Position before us. Punishment, it seems, hath no Retrospect, no Regard to Sin already committed. To what then hath it a Regard? Not surely to Sin as yet uncommitted: For unjust it must be, no doubt, to punish a Man for what he never did. It remains, if it hath any Regard to Sin at all, it must respect it in the very Act of Commission. From this Account of the Matter, the following Conclusion may be drawn; *viz.* Where the Act of Sin is momentary and instantaneous, there the Punishment must be so likewise; and, consequently, some of the greatest

S E R M O N IV. 123

greatest of Sins, such as Murder, and the like, may subject Men to the least Punishments; whilst others, longer in Commission, but in themselves less heinous, shall subject them to the greatest.—Not to insist, that perhaps all our Perceptions, whether of Good or Evil, are received in Time;—and that we know not how to form a Notion of instantaneous Happiness or Misery.

There is one Way, however, of evading this Argument; and that is, by asserting, that Sin consists not so much in the Act, as the Habit and Disposition of the Person who commits it; that Punishment respects this Habit;—begins and ends with it; and must be as unjust when the Habit is removed, as it would have been before that Habit was contracted.

But is this true, that Punishment always begins and ends with the Disposition to Vice? Are there no Sinners who remain for many Years unpunished;—none who are punished after this Disposition ceases? What shall we say of those which arise from the present Constitution of Nature, and which are therefore called the natural Punishments of Vice? Do these determine as soon as ever the Sinner reforms? Can it therefore be said, that
Punish-

124 S E R M O N IV.

Punishment respects only what a Man is actually in doing, or a Disposition of doing, and not what hath been formerly done by him? Is this the Sense which the Generality of Mankind have of this Matter; or indeed the Sense which any one serious Person ever entertained of it? If nothing of all this can be affirmed, we may set the common Sense and Reason of Mankind against the Presumptions of any bold Asserter; concluding with Assurance, that Punishment may be inflicted for what is past: And, if so, that the Supreme Governor and Director of the World hath a Right to inflict it at what time soever he pleases.

Nor will it be sufficient to allege, that Goodness is concerned to prevent the Execution of those Punishments, which Justice might otherwise appoint: For we are no Judges of the whole Nature and Extent of Goodness; — or, to speak more properly, we cannot always determine to what Instances it is applicable. This indeed we know in general, that Goodness consists in a Disposition to communicate Happiness so far as it may be fit and proper to do so: But to do this against the Fitness and Propriety of Things, would not be an Act of Goodness,
but

S E R M O N IV. 125

but Folly. Are we then Judges of every thing that is fit and proper to be done? Or is this a Question so easily decided? If not, it is Presumption to conclude peremptorily, or to lay such Weight on so uncertain a Foundation.

But the Vanity of this Subterfuge will be more evident from what I am about to offer under my

III. Proposition; *viz.* As God may, consistently with his Attributes, inflict Punishment for Sin, so the Reasons of his moral Government seem to require he should inflict it; unless some Way be found to repair the Injury done by Sin to the Cause of Virtue, and the Authority of God.

I have supposed already, that God is the Governor of the World; and that not only in a natural Sense, by supporting its natural Frame and Constitution;—but likewise in a moral Sense, by enacting Laws,---by a sufficient Promulgation of them,---by a continual Overseeing Mens Actions,---by approving or disapproving them,---and by annexing to his Laws such Sanctions as are proper to enforce them.

How these Matters appear on the Foot of Revelation, I am not now to enquire: But,
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126 S E R M O N IV.

if we consult only common Reason, we may conclude, that the natural Apprehensions of Punishment for Sin, which have been already insisted on, cannot be vain and groundless Apprehensions. God never acts in vain. Every natural Desire hath some correspondent Object; and every natural Terror its true and real Foundation. Men may indeed, by wrong Ways of Thinking, work themselves into a Belief of what never was, nor will be: But the Case is different, when we come to consider a Belief originally rooted in our very Frame. This hath God himself for its Cause; and, therefore, must have a Reason and Ground as certain, as is the Truth of God himself. And, as he is supposed to speak to us by these natural Suggestions, so nothing, which he thus speaks, can fail.

If it be said (as perhaps it may be said), that the Design of implanting these Terrors in us, was to protect and guard Virtue, and to prevent the Practice of Vice; and that their Effect this way must be the same, whether Punishment be ever really executed or not;—though the former Part of the Suggestion be allowed, the latter must as resolutely be denied: For, supposing that their Effect on the Persons possessed of them should

S E R M O N IV. 127

should be the same, where these Terrors are believed to have a real and firm Foundation; —yet they cannot have a like Effect, where they are believed to be mere empty Terrors. To such Persons they may prove present Disquiets, which embitter Life, and abate of of its Enjoyments : But no one will be really influenced by them, who is persuaded they mean nothing : Such will proceed in their Vices notwithstanding ;---will sin, and tremble, and laugh at their own Fears, and so sin again.

To take one Step farther : God, as was observed before, is the Supreme Governor of the World,---and, as such, concerned to support the Authority of his own Laws. Justice is one of his essential Attributes ; upon which account all his Laws must be just,---fit for Him to make, and for Man to obey. These, when made, must, for the same Reasons that they were made at first, be executed ; that is, either obeyed by Man, or the Violation of them, in some way or other, punished by God. All this follows from the Consideration of Justice, as the Attribute of our Supreme Governor ; and which cannot any more fail in the Administration of the executive, than of the legislative Part of Government.

Much

128 S E R M O N IV.

Much the same Argument may, with a little Change of Expression, be represented thus: Laws, as such, must have their proper Sanctions: Without these they cease to be Laws; and those Sanctions, which must never be executed, are, in effect, no Sanctions. As therefore the principal Sanction of Law is Punishment, never to execute this Punishment is to give up the Law; which strict Justice in the Governor can never do.

Vain therefore is the Distinction sometimes made, between what *Justice permits*, and what that same *Justice requires*. So far as the present Point is concerned, there seems to be no manner of Difference; because, for the same Reasons that God may punish Sin consistently with Justice, he seems concerned to do so in consequence of his Justice; and because Sin deserves Punishment, as being a Violation of what is in itself right, and an Affront to absolute Authority,---therefore the Supreme Governor, who directs all things according to strict Justice, seems concerned to inflict the Punishment deserved: For to inflict deserved Punishment, is but to render what properly belongs to the Sinner; and the very Nature of Justice consists in this, That it gives to all Men their Due.

But

S E R M O N IV. 129

But if, after all, it should still be insisted on, that Justice rather requires the Payment of Debts claimed, than the Infliction of Punishments deserved ; and, consequently, that certain Execution of such Punishments cannot be concluded from the mere Consideration of Justice ; if this, I say, should be insisted on, it might be no difficult Matter to give a just and satisfactory Reply. However, let us see, whether the Point advanced may not be supported on another Foot.

We are to remember then, that Wisdom is in God absolute ; and that Wisdom is seen not only in chusing a proper End, but in prosecuting that End by the most suitable and proper Means. In the present Case, we must consider the Rule of Duty prescribed to us, as the End ; and the Sanctions of this Duty, as the proper Means to enforce it. If no Sanctions were annexed, an End would be proposed without any sufficient Means ; and if no Sanctions be executed, it is much the same as though they had been never proposed.

Let us consider how human Government is supported and carried on ; and how human Laws receive their Force and Effect upon the subject. Is it by the bare Promulgation of Laws ?--Is it not rather by a strict and vigor-

130 S E R M O N IV.

ous Execution of them? Is not a Remissness in Government ever found destructive of that Government? whilst the jealous asserting Authority, and a making Men feel what they will not obey, begets Reverence towards it. But can Men think that the Laws of Nature are of less Consequence than the Laws of Men; or Divine Authority less awful than human? If these therefore ought to be preserved (and surely Wisdom requires they should be so), how can it be presumed, that God will give up these great Points, merely to please Men, willing to indulge their Passions, and unwilling to suffer for it?

In short, if there be a supreme moral Government of the World;—if that Government be managed by the exactest Rules of Justice and Wisdom;—if both Justice and Wisdom require, that Punishment, the necessary Sanction of Law, should be distributed; and if, without this, neither Law nor Government can subsist;—then, I hope, this Point will be admitted, that, upon the Foot of human Reason, the Supreme Governor is concerned to inflict those Punishments which are the just Desert of Sin.

But, it will be said, On this Supposition, no Flesh can be saved. All Men have sinned, and

S E R M O N IV. 131

and come short of the Glory of God. But, if Punishment be so much the Desert of Sin, that God is concerned to inflict it at all Events, as there can be no Room for Mercy on his Part, so there can be no Possibility of Salvation on ours. This is a most uncomfortable View of our Condition; and who is there capable of bearing it?

In answer to this, let it be observed, that I have stated the Expediency of Punishment for Sin on Reasons of Government; on the Necessity of supporting Law, and gaining Reverence to Divine Authority. If therefore any Methods can be contrived, whereby Law may be supported, and Divine Authority vindicated, without the actual Infliction of Punishment on the offending Person,----then Room will be still left for Mercy; a Way of Escape may remain,----and Severity be duly mixed with Tendernefs. If then this may be done (and who will affirm that it cannot?) there are strong Presumptions that it hath been done, arising; as from other Considerations; so likewise from the present State and Condition of Man, --- labouring under the greatest Trials,---tempted from without, and betrayed from within,---frail and weak of himself, and yet liable to continue Assaults

132 S E R M O N IV.

from his spiritual Adversaries :—But I forbear prosecuting this Point here, which shall be distinctly considered under another Head; and chuse rather to pass on to my

IVth Proposition, which was this ; Man, of himself, is incapable of doing any thing sufficient to repair the Mischief which his Sin hath caused ; and therefore, on this Foot only, he must remain without Comfort, and without Hope.

There are Two Ways only which Men have hitherto thought on, to relieve themselves in these Circumstances ; and these are, The offering Sacrifices of Beasts, in order to propitiate the Deity ; and Repentance, and Reformation for the future. But, if it shall appear that neither of these can make sufficient Amends for past Sin,---can restore Dignity to Law violated, or regain Weight to Divine Authority ; then, on this Foot only, the Condition of Mankind must be wretched.

As to the Sacrifices of Beasts, what the Apostle says, by Divine Authority, may be concluded even by common Reason ; *It is impossible that the Blood of Bulls and of Goats should take away Sin.* It is impossible it should do so by any inherent Virtue of its own ; and therefore, whatever Virtue it had this way,

S E R M O N IV. 133

way, must be owing to some secret Reference God appointed it should have to somewhat else. But this (whatever it be) is out of the present Supposition. We are here to consider, not the Virtue such Sacrifices may have in consequence of Divine Appointment, but their own natural Force and Efficacy; in which respect, they are so far from securing to Men the Pardon of Sin, that they seem rather to point out to them the Punishment that Sin deserved; and so appear rather as Memorials of their Guilt, than Ensurances of Pardon.

And yet it is Matter of Fact, that almost all Nations have used Sacrifices in order to atone for Sin; and have conceived singular Hopes from the Performance. Of this a just Account may be given, upon Supposition, that such Sacrifices were originally instituted by God,---intended by him to keep up in Mens Minds a due Sense of the Demerit of Sin, and to intimate to them Hopes of some more effectual Sacrifice to be made in future Time. But without this it will be difficult to apprehend, how a Practice of this kind ever came in use at all; at least, how it came to be so general, and used by almost all Nations of the World: For, considered in itself,

134 S E R M O N IV.

however it might flatter the Hopes of the lower and ill-judging Part of Mankind, it could never give the least Satisfaction to the wise and philosophical.

Their greatest Hopes must be built on the Efficacy of Repentance ; and for this indeed somewhat may be said, at first Sight, specious. Repentance implies in it a Grief and Concern for having transgressed, and a consequent Return to that Duty we have violated. This indeed is in itself, and on its own Account, acceptable, and the whole that Man is capable of doing in such Circumstances. But then, it deserves to be considered, at the same time, that Man, as God's Creature, is under an indispensable Obligation to obey him always. As every Faculty of ours was derived from God, so ought it at all Seasons to be consecrated to his Service. Had Man, therefore, continued innocent, and never in any Instance offended, he would still have continued under an Obligation to serve and obey God : And therefore, what would have been but the Duty of the Saint, can make no Atonement for the Sinner.

It is true indeed, by Repentance perfected, a Man's present State is such as it ought to be : But doth this prove that he was always
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S E R M O N IV. 135

in such a State ? Or, doth this make Amends for the Mischief, which his former bad State occasioned ? I do allow, this is *all* that a man can do at present ; but doth this undo what is past ?---If a Man reforms, and returns to a just Sense of Duty, One thing is gained indeed ; the Dignity of Law is repaired, so far as he himself is immediately concerned : But Actions, public ones at least, have an extensive Influence : They affect the Behaviour of other Men ; they derogate from that Influence which the Law ought to have over others,---which, once weakened, cannot be repaired by any future Actions we ourselves can perform. But must the Divine Authority over his Creatures suffer, because we have wilfully affronted it, and are now incapable of repairing the Mischief ? Or rather, have we not Reason to fear, lest the Example of our Sufferings should be applied to make what Amends it can for the Example of our former Disobedience ? This, I say, may be feared, or justly suspected at least ; and therefore, on this Foot only, we may reasonably cry out, *How shall we escape from the Wrath to come ?*

But, bad as this View of our Condition is, I am yet to observe,

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V. That,

136 S E R M O N IV.

V. That, notwithstanding this, a Persuasion hath always obtained, that God will forgive Sin; and, consequently, that some Method hath been contrived (whatever that Method be) whereby such Forgiveness may be vouchsafed, consistently with the Regard owing to the Interest of Virtue, and the Divine Dignity.

Without this, how miserable must have been the Condition of Mankind! To be conscious of Sins which deserve a Punishment they are incapable by any means of avoiding, must have run them into utter Despair;---have disappointed the Enjoyment of any Good in Life;---and, instead of bringing them to God in the Way of Worship and Obedience, have kept them at the utmost Distance from him: For who would, or indeed could, apply to God, whilst he supposed him to be inexorable?

And yet God was worshiped, in some sort or other, by the whole Race of Mankind: His Favour was entreated, and his Displeasure deprecated; and the Blessings they received, imputed to his generous Bounty.

God's Providence shewed itself, and that always in a more or less remarkable Manner, by prospering Men, whilst they pursued the
Rules

S E R M O N IV. 137

Rules of Virtue; and by afflicting them, when they turned aside to Vice: And those very Persons, who, being afflicted, grew better, the same Providence watched over for Good: So that, in the common Course of things, there seemed to appear some Intimation, that *God desireth not the Death of a Sinner, but rather that he should return and live.*

The whole Order and Conduct of Providence hath constantly been calculated for the Good of Man: His Wants have been supplied, and Provision made for his innocent Pleasures: Every Desire hath had some Gratification afforded it, and constantly afforded, where it was consistent with Virtue, and fell in with the common Interest. But doth this look as though our whole Race was devoted to Destruction? And are these the Signs of inextinguishable Displeasure? And might not Men therefore reasonably hope (as hope in fact they did), that the Sins they had committed did not so separate between them and their God, as to make all future Communications between them impossible?

Had that been supposed the Case, might they not have argued thus; Why are we continued here one Moment? Why is not the

138 S E R M O N IV.

the Punishment, which is never to be remitted, immediately executed upon us; and the very Capacity of doing more Mischief by future Sins prevented? How is it, that a Power is any longer intrusted with us, which we are incapable of using, but to the Hurt of ourselves and others; which we cannot apply to any good Purpose,---which bad Men certainly will apply to a bad one? Such an absolute Despair must produce at once the most consummate Wickedness and Misery.

But, instead of taking any such View of their Condition, did they not consider themselves as in a State of Trial? As making this Life a Preparation for a better; and qualifying themselves for the Favour of God hereafter?

And yet they, as well as we, were sensible, they were incapable of acting an uniform and perfect Part; were liable to frequent Failings; and committed, upon many Occasions, Offences of a more heinous Nature. But, had they thought these absolutely unpardonable, what Encouragement could they have to take one farther Step in Virtue? Or, how could they beg for that Forgiveness they never hoped for?

Hope then they did, and hope they might,

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S E R M O N IV. 139

as well from considering the necessary Perfections of God's Nature, as the Instances of a good and merciful Providence. It is unavoidable but the absolutely-independent Being must be endued with every possible Perfection, in every possible Degree of it; and, consequently, with that which is the most lovely Perfection, Goodness. But doth not Goodness dispose the Being possessed of it to communicate Good to others, in all those Cases in which it is fit and proper to communicate it? It certainly does, because the very Nature of this Perfection implies it. True is it indeed, Tenderneſs is not a Paſſion in God, as it is in us. He doth not feel, and partake in our Happineſs; nor can he be affected by our painful Senſations, as we are by one another's. In him the Perfection is a constant Determination to do Good, ſo far as it may be rightly done. If then there were no Unſuitneſs in the Nature of the Thing, that Sin ſhould on any account be forgiven, they promiſed themſelves it would be ſo; and, on this Foot, we may ſuppoſe they (that is, all thoſe who reaſoned carefully on theſe Matters) ſupported themſelves under even the Difficulties and Miſfortunes of Life.

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140 S E R M O N IV.

So far as this they did, I say, hope Sin might, and would be, forgiven, upon Repentance and Reformation. But then I must observe withal, that there is a great Difference between Hope and Assurance. Hope is founded on the Appearance of probable Reasons; but Assurance, (absolute Assurance, I mean) on the strictest Certainty. Probability there was, from the Considerations before suggested; but absolute Certainty there could be none, without an express Declaration of God concerning it. And the Reason is plainly this; Goodness is a Disposition, or Determination, to communicate Good;---not all possible Good, but such only as is fit and proper to be communicated. How far Goodness therefore is concerned to pardon Sin upon Repentance and Reformation, cannot be concluded from the mere Consideration of Goodness itself: We are obliged to make a farther Enquiry, and to consider, whether it be fit and proper to do so. But can mere human Reason sufficiently determine upon this Point? Or, are we Judges of all that is fit and proper for God to do?

In some Instances indeed we may pronounce on Fitness: In these, for Example; As God is the Supreme Governor of the
World,

S E R M O N IV. 141

World, it is fit his Authority should be sufficiently supported :---As Virtue is the right State of every rational Being, it is fit the Cause of Virtue should be maintained ;---and if these are once violated, it is fit they should be fully vindicated. But, alas ! these Fitnesses, apparent to every one, are against us. Man hath sinned. Man cannot, of himself, repair the Mischief of his Sin. We know not in what way this Mischief can be repaired. We cannot of ourselves prove, that it can be repaired at all ;---at least, otherwise repaired than by our Punishment : For, as we know not the whole Scheme of things, so we can have no full Assurance from any Reflections of our own, what is, or is not, consistent with this Scheme.

Here then things darken upon us again, and leave us in sad Perplexity. However, they do not entirely exclude Hope. Though we cannot for certain say, Sin *will* be pardoned ; yet neither do we perceive, by any certain Arguments, it *cannot* be pardoned. A Way there may be to reconcile this with every Divine Attribute ;---to illustrate Justice and Mercy together ; to confirm Authority ; to gain Reverence to Law ; and to repair, in the most ample Manner, the Mischiefs which
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142 S E R M O N IV.

our Sin hath caused. What this Way is, comes now to be considered under my

LAST general Head, where I am to shew, that the Doctrine concerning Satisfaction for Sin by the Death of Christ, doth fully and unexceptionably answer these Purposes : From whence it follows, that the Doctrine is, from its own Nature, credible, and readily to be embraced upon sufficient Authority of Holy Scripture.

The true Account of the Matter is, in short, this ; That Mankind having sinned, and fallen short of the Glory of God, it was, in itself, fit and proper, that such Animadversion should be taken on Sin, as might make sufficient Amends for it ; or, in other Words, either that the Sinner should suffer that Punishment which Sin deserved, --- or, that some other Equivalent should be made, which might answer all the Ends of Punishment. If the latter might be done, then the former might be remitted ; and, upon that Foot, there will be Room for Grace and Favour, consistently with the Demands of Righteousness and Justice.

To this purpose God decreed from all Eternity what he executed in a proper Time ; viz. To send his own Son into the World,

not

S E R M O N IV. 143

not merely (as some would have it) to teach the Rules of Righteousness,---or to illustrate them by his Practice, --- or to confirm them by his Death (for any, or all these, could only serve to aggravate Mens Condemnation in violating these Rules ;---but to accomplish somewhat vastly greater ;---to stand in Mens Stead ;---to suffer for their Sins ;---to satisfy by these Sufferings ;---to merit their Pardon by this Satisfaction ; and, in consequence of this, to perfect a Reconciliation between God and Man.

But, in order to do this effectually, somewhat was needful, which I have not yet distinctly mentioned. As the Son of God, and consequently as God, he might teach and enforce the Divine Laws : But, as such, he could not represent Man, or suffer in his Stead : For there is no Principle of Reason more sure than this, that the Divine Nature is incapable of suffering.

For this Purpose then the Doctrine before us teaches, that the Divine Nature of Christ was united to the Human ; that it was so united, as to constitute One single Person ;---that by such an Union, whatever might be affirmed concerning the Acts of either Nature, might be affirmed of the Person ; and,
con-

144 S E R M O N IV.

consequently, as by the Human Nature he could suffer, and by the Divine merit, so the same Person most effectually did both.

The Doctrine thus briefly represented will be found entirely reasonable, if the following Propositions be made good ;

1. One Person may be substituted for, and become the Representative of, another, in such a Manner, that the Acts of the Representative shall be considered as performed by the Person he represents.

2. One Person may be substituted for another, even in the Administrations of distributive Justice ; in those Cases, at least, where the Punishments inflicted on one Party shall fully answer the Ends of Punishment to be sustained by the other.

3. According to the Doctrine now proposed, the Condition of our Blessed Lord was such, as rendered the Sufferings he sustained* for us answerable to all the Punishments due to Sinners ; insomuch, that by them every End might be compassed, which could be promoted by the personal Sufferings of the Offenders ; and all that Reparation made, which possibly could be made, for the Sins committed by them. And,

4. Upon this Account, the Sufferings of
Christ

S E R M O N IV. 145

Christ may, not unfitly, be said, to *make a full, perfect, and sufficient Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World.* Of these as briefly as possible.

The first Proposition advanced by me, on this Occasion, will not be contested by any Adversaries we contend with. On common Occasions, and in the Transactions of civil Life, it will be admitted, that one Person may represent another; and that the Acts of the Representative may be considered as performed by the Person he represents. This is founded on the strongest Reasons; and must be admitted, not only because, on any other Foot, the Affairs of Life cannot be carried on,—but likewise because whatever is done, in this Case, answers every End which could be answered by the personal Transaction of the Party himself. As, therefore, we shall have no Difficulties on this Head, I shall pass on to the

Second Proposition; namely, That one Person may be substituted for another, even in the Administrations of distributive Justice. This seems to rest on much the same Bottom with the former Proposition: For, if one Person may act for another, why may he not likewise, in some Cases, suffer for him? at

146 S E R M O N IV.

least, where he himself consents to do so, and the Administrator of Justice accepts it.

It will be vain to say, that Sin being the personal Act of the Offender, Punishment is personally due to him alone ; and, therefore, can be no more transferred from the Offender to the Innocent, than Sin itself can be. This kind of Arguing will equally affect a Substitution of Persons in any other Case. The Act of the Representative is, in Strictness of speaking, his own proper Act ; but, in a legal Sense, it is the Act of his Principal : So likewise the Punishment inflicted on the Representative,---though as felt only by himself, it is his own personal Suffering, is yet considered as inflicted on the Sinner, in whose Place he stands. The *strict* and *philosophical* Sense of Acting and Suffering we have nothing to do with, when we are discoursing only concerning the *moral* or *legal* Sense of them.

Now, that a Man may, in some Cases, so stand in the Room of another as to suffer for him, and in his Stead, might be supported (had I time to enlarge) by similar Instances in the Transactions of civil Life ; by assigning Cases not much unlike this, in which one Man, by sustaining the Character of

S E R M O N IV. 147

of another, becomes liable to all those Sufferings which are properly that other's Due. But, without insisting on this, I shall only observe farther, in Support of this Proposition, that this Translation of Punishment from the Offender to the Representative, is defended only in those Cases, where the Punishments inflicted on the one Party do fully answer all the Ends of Punishment inflicted on the other. Whether this can be the Case, is another Question, and which I shall have Occasion to consider in the next Step of my Argument. At present I may be allowed to suppose it, and upon that Supposition to argue, that such a Translation of Punishment is entirely agreeable with Reason. For, upon what Reasons are Punishments necessary at all? Upon some Reasons, no doubt. Now, if these are once answered, all farther Punishment will be unnecessary; and, if so, then the Man personally guilty may escape, by the Sufferings of another substituted in his Room. This I do allege as Proof defensible against all Objections.

The 3d, and main Point to be considered, is this: According to the Doctrine before proposed, the Condition of our Blessed Lord was such, as rendered the Sufferings he sus-

148 S E R M O N IV.

tained for us fully answerable to all the Punishments due to Sinners. By them every End was compassed, which could be promoted by the personal Sufferings of the Offenders ; and all the Reparation made, which possibly could be made, for the Sins committed by them.

Christ is supposed, in the Account before given, to have been God as well as Man ;--- and, consequently, a Person of infinite Dignity and Excellence. From whence it follows, not only that he was capable of meriting, as not being, strictly speaking, subject to Obligation ;---but likewise, that his Merits must be strictly infinite ; this arising from his own infinite Worth and Dignity. When, therefore, he was pleased to interpose for Man,---to sustain his Character,---to become his Representative, --- and to suffer in his Stead,---the Sufferings so undergone must be a full Equivalent for all the Punishments due to Sin. All Mankind are, by no means, to be compared with the Son of God : All their Lives are of inferior Value to his ; and, consequently, all their Deaths of less Importance than his Sacrifice.

But this is an Argument (whatever Force there be really in it) by some thought too subtle ;

S E R M O N IV. 149

subtle ; and many little Arts have been used to evade it. Let us consider that Point then in another View ; and enquire, whether those several Ends were not fully compassed by the Sufferings of Christ, which might be promoted by the personal Sufferings of Sinners.

What then are the Ends of Punishment ? The Maintainance of Law, no doubt, and to prevent the Violations of it. They were threatened with this View ; and they are executed for the very same Reasons. Where Punishments are not eternal, they may serve for the Sinner's own Amendment ;---or, if you please, to prevent his own future Offences : And where they are eternal, they may serve to impress an Awe on others, and to preserve them in a continual State of Obedience. But are not these Ends as fully answered by the Sufferings of Christ, as by the Sufferings of the Sinner ? Can the strict Righteousness of God,---his unalterable Love of Virtue,---and his inflexible Aversion to Sin, be more clearly evidenced, than by not sparing his own Son, when he sustained the Character of Sinners ? After this, can any one hope to escape the Indignation and Severity of God, if he still goes on wilfully in his Sins ? And

150 S E R M O N IV.

can there be any higher Motives proposed, whereby either to confirm the Innocent, or to reclaim the Offender? If not, we may affirm, that the Sufferings of Christ in our Stead, have answered every Purpose which could be answered by the Punishment of ourselves.

Punishment indeed, whether suffered by ourselves or others, is not, in Strictness, a Reparation for our Offences. It does not prove, that we have not offended, but the contrary; nor is it properly an Equivalent for having acted wrong. But then, it doth this: It serves to take off the Influence which such ill Example may have; it restores to Authority that Reverence which Sin destroyed; and gives Glory to those Perfections of the Divine Nature, which had suffered Affront by the Iniquities of Men. This is all the Reparation which is, in such a Case, possible; And therefore, if this hath been as effectually, or rather more effectually, made by Christ's, than by any personal Sufferings of ours,---then the Proposition, now before us, will be clearly justified.

There remains but One Thing more; namely, that, upon Account of what I have just now observed, the Sufferings of Christ may,

S E R M O N IV. 151

may, not unfitly, be said to make *a full, perfect, and sufficient Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World.*

It will be needless to enlarge on this, which is but an immediate Conclusion from the foregoing Proposition. To satisfy, is a Payment made in one kind or way for somewhat due in another. Such a Satisfaction hath Christ made ;—a Satisfaction for the Punishment of Sin, by bearing it himself ; and a Satisfaction, in some sort, for Sin committed, by taking away all the ill Consequences of that Sin ;---by asserting the Cause of Virtue in the strongest Manner ;---by restoring Law to its original Dignity ;---and by procuring to the Divine Perfections the profoundest Veneration ;—to Holiness, whose Laws had been violated ;---to Justice, whose Severity had been despised ;---to Wisdom, whose Precepts had been neglected ;---and to Goodness, whose Favours had been received indeed, but forgotten. And if this be not a full and perfect, and, of consequence, a sufficient Satisfaction, it is impossible to say what can be sufficient, or indeed what Satisfaction means at all.

Upon the whole then, if the Doctrine we have been considering do fully answer every

152 S E R M O N IV.

Purpose intended by it, and be reconcileable to every Principle of Reason,---it must, so far, be credible; that is, it must, at least, be capable of Proof from those Heads which may be proper to evince it: For, if nothing can be concluded against it from the Nature of the Thing, it may, so far as we know, be true; and, if it may, we are certainly concerned to enquire, whether it be true or not. Thus much at least must follow from the very State now given of the Doctrine.

But we need not rest the Matter here, when the whole of what I have now delivered is laid together. If all Mankind are conscious of Sins which deserve Punishment; ---if God may execute this Punishment; ---if, upon several Accounts, he seems concerned to do so, unless proper Amends be made for the Violation of Law; ---and if we ourselves are incapable, in any way, of making such Amends; ---then, in order to our Salvation, some other Equivalent, or Satisfaction, must be paid. That such would, some way or other, be paid, is entirely agreeable to the general Hopes of Mankind; from whence likewise it cannot but be presumed, that somewhat of this kind hath been done, though the best Improvements of natural Reason

S E R M O N IV. 153

Reason could never find out the Way. But now a Scheme is offered which sets all at rights; a Scheme, entirely worthy of the Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness of the Contriver; a Scheme, which, at the first Proposal, should engage a favourable Attention, and incline us to receive it gladly.— But I am running too far. I shall therefore shut up with these Words of Adoration; *Great and marvellous are thy Works, Lord, God Almighty; just and true are thy Ways, thou King of Saints.*

S E R-

S E R M O N V.

The Needfulness of a REVELATION,
shewn from the Imperfection of the
Law of Nature considered as a Rule
of Duty.

LUKE i. 78, 79.

— *Whereby the Day-spring from on High
bath visited us,
To give Light to them that sit in Darkneſs,
and the Shadow of Death; and to guide our
Feet into the Way of Peace.*

THE Design of our Blessed Lord's Ap-
pearance in the World is represented
to us, as in several other Places of
Holy Scripture, so particularly in the Words
now read to you. We are taught, that he
did

156 S E R M O N V.

did not come to surprife or to amufe Mankind,---but to profecute an Affair of the higheft Moment, the Happinefs and Salvation of the World ;---to procure, and feal to Men the Divine Pardon ;---to instruct their Minds ;---to regulate their Lives ;---and, in fhort, to do every thing towards the Furtherance of their Salvation, which either their own unhappy Circumftances required, or the Divine Reftitude and Perfection could admit of. Thus *Zacharias*, under the Influence of the Holy Ghof, ftates the Matter ; *The Day-fpring from on High hath vifited us, to give Light to them that fit in Darknefs, and in the Shadow of Death ; and to guide our Feet into the Way of Peace.*

But fome Man may fay, What Occafion could there be for profecuting this End in fo extraordinary a Way ? There hath fubfifted a proper Rule of Action from the Beginning of the World. The fame God, who was the Author of our Being, hath enforced it on us. This is called the Law of Nature ; And this Law is fo full, fo clear, and fo well fupported, as to fupersede any other kind of Provision. But if an extraordinary Revelation be, on this Account, needless, then the Belief of it muft, of courfe, be groundlefs.

If

S E R M O N V. 157

If any Difficulty be thought to arise from hence, I shall endeavour to remove it,

- I. By stating what we should understand by the Law of Nature ; from whence the Obligation of it arises ; and how far it extends.
- II. By enquiring, whether this Law, if properly understood, be not, in many respects, imperfect. And therefore,
- III. Whether an extraordinary Manifestation of the Divine Will were not, on that account, needful.

I. It is necessary to begin with stating what we should understand by the Law of Nature ; and so much the more so, because the greatest Mistakes on this Subject have been owing to a Confusion in this Point.

The Objection before suggested sets forth, that there hath subsisted a proper Rule of Action from the Beginning of the World ;—that the same God, who was the Author of our Being, hath enforced it on us ;—and that this is called, *The Law of Nature*. But here a Question must arise, whether something farther be not necessary to constitute a Law, than merely a Rule of Action, and a Superior

158 S E R M O N V.

rior willing it? Whether we ought not to add a Promulgation of this Rule ;--at least a putting it within the Power of those to discover this Rule, who are concerned to observe it.

Different Persons have thought differently on this Point ; and whilst some have maintained, that the Law of Nature is a Collection of all those moral Rules which are founded in the Nature and Reasons of Things,--others have understood it as a Collection of such Rules only, as are discoverable by us in the Use and Exercise of those Faculties which God hath been pleased to grant us.

If we understand the Law of Nature in the former Sense, we shall carry it much farther than a reasonable Man can allow of ; we shall extend the Law of Nature to things undiscoverable by the Light of Nature ; we shall make a Law where there neither is, nor can be, Obligation : For no one can possibly be obliged to that, which he is incapable of knowing. If, therefore, there be any Matters in their own Nature fit to be done, but which are so far Secrets to us, that we are unable to discover them, they will so far cease to be Matters of Duty to us : And
though,

S E R M O N V. 159

though, upon account of real Fitness, they may become the proper Subject of some future Law, yet Man, at present, must be free from all Obligation to them.

The true Account of the Matter seems to be this; The Law of Nature signifies such a Collection of moral Rules as are discoverable by us in the proper Use of those Faculties which we enjoy. By discovering how far these will carry us, we shall learn the proper Extent of this Law.

But here I conceive it will be of Moment to observe, that human Reason may be considered, either as it is dispersed through all human Kind,--or else as it subsists separately in every particular Person. If we take it in the former View, we admit, that human Reason may master all those Points, which are capable of being comprehended by any particular Man, under any Circumstances whatsoever: And thus, we say, nothing is above human Reason, but that which is above every Man's Reason.

Yet Matters will appear otherwise, if we consider the Expression in the latter Sense of it. What doth it signify to the illiterate and ignorant, that *Socrates*, for instance, hath carried his moral Discoveries to an extraordinary

160 S E R M O N V.

nary Height? The Reason of *Socrates* is, and must be, his own Rule: And, upon the same account, the Reason of his Slave is, and must be, *his*. As far therefore as the same things are capable of appearing in the same Light to both these Persons, they will have the same Law of Duty: But if it shall happen, that the Reason of *Socrates* shall carry him farther than the Reason of his Slave, in proportion *his* Reason will enlarge his Obligations; and things will become Matter of Duty to the one, which are not so to the other.

What then, in this Case, is the Law of Nature? Is it exactly the same to both? By no means; for then each Person would be under the same Engagements: But, if their Engagements be different, their Laws must be so likewise. When, therefore, we talk of Mens being obliged by the *Law of Nature*, it can really amount to no more than this; That every Man ought to perform those things which his own particular Reason suggests to him, without Regard to those farther Discoveries, which, though made by others, are incomprehensible by himself.

In consequence of this, we ought to distinguish between a *Rule of Fitness*, and a *Law of Duty*. The former will be the same
to

S E R M O N V. 161

to all Mankind ; but the latter must vary in proportion to each particular Man's Attainments or Opportunities : And whatever Degrees of Perfection we allow to the one, yet the other, under the Direction of natural Light, will be greatly imperfect.

That there is a God ;---that we derived our Being from him ;---that he is perfect in his Nature ;---that he exercises a Providence over us ;---and therefore ought to be obeyed by us in every thing which appears to be his Will,--are Points which I take to be knowable by the far greatest Part of Mankind ;---by all indeed who are able to exercise their reasoning Power in any tolerable Degree. Here therefore a Question arises ; What is the Divine Will ;---and what are the Particulars to which it reaches ?

To this we may reply in general, That those things which are fit and proper to be done by us in any Circumstance, must be agreeable with the Divine Pleasure : For he who placed us in these Circumstances, must will that we should act agreeably to them, so far as we are able, in the Use of our Reason, to discover this Fitness.

From hence it will appear, that our Obligations to Duty are founded in the Will of

162 S E R M O N V.

God. Law itself is, and must be, the Decree of a Superior. We are therefore obliged, because he commands us, to whom we are naturally subject. And Reason, strictly speaking, is rather the Means whereby we come at Obligation, than the proper Ground or Foundation on which it is built.

If this be true, we may easily discern, how little Morality can subsist without the Aid of Religion; and how injurious those must prove to Virtue, who, abstracting from the Consideration of a God, pretend to promote its real Interests by those Methods which most evidently subvert it.

Hitherto I have observed, that what is fit and proper to be done, must be agreeable with the Divine Pleasure. What may so appear to Us, is to Us *the Law of Nature*: And we are therefore obliged to the Performance of it;---or it therefore becomes *a Law*, because the Divine Will requires our Obedience.

But, how far, I would desire to know, can human Reason, in this respect, carry Men?---To every thing in itself fit and proper?---This will hardly be asserted, in favour of the wisest Man that ever yet appeared. And if the wisest do really fall short, what
Judg-

S E R M O N V. 163

Judgment must we pass on the Bulk and Generality of the World? Have they Capacities and Opportunities sufficient to compass so great an End? And though *Socrates*, for Instance, should have succeeded perfectly well in his Searches, yet the Rule, so discovered by him, could to him alone have the Force of Law; the rest of Mankind being still left to their own Reasonings and Apprehensions. His Discoveries therefore are not that general Rule, to which all the rest of the World are obliged to conform, unless he were able to infuse his own Knowledge into them, and to make them likewise Masters of his Arguments.

Here then lies the Error of those, who represent the *Law of Nature* as a sufficient and complete Rule of Life. By *Law of Nature* they either mean, "a perfect Collection of all those Precepts, which are founded on the Nature and Reasons of Things;---or, at least, such a Collection as the best and wisest Men in fact have made, or may be presumed capable of making;---whereas this Law (as it ought to be understood in the present Question) is by no means fixed and uniform: It varies in proportion to the different Capacities of different Men; and therefore, to

164 S E R M O N V.

know how perfect it is, we must know thoroughly, how far the Reason and Opportunities of each particular Person are able to carry him.

If it should be said, that the Wise and Learned ought to direct the Ignorant; it is well said, according to the common Rules of Prudence: But then a Variety of Questions will be apt to arise concerning the proper Qualifications of those who ought to direct Mens Lives; what Degrees of Knowledge and Learning are sufficient for this Purpose; and what Proportion of Honesty and Integrity in the pretended Teacher will justify Mens Reliance on his Skill.

But, in fact, we find, that Men are not over forward to credit their Fellow-creatures in such concerning Points. Each Man thinks he can determine for himself; and therefore will not take another's Judgment, unless he can first reconcile it to his own. Be a Man therefore wise as *Socrates*, yet, unless he is able to transfuse into others some Proportion of his own Wisdom, he will succeed but little. Those, he would persuade, will be apt to tell him, their own Eyes were given them to see with; ---that they do not need his Assistance; ---and that, if they perform.

S E R M O N V. 165

form what they themselves discern to be their Duty, all is well.

What Methods then could the Philosopher use to influence the World? If indeed he could once persuade them, that he came immediately from God himself, all Disputes, in reference to Law and Obligation, would be concluded: For, however Men may sometimes differ about the Meaning of a Revelation, yet no Difficulties can arise about our Obedience to the acknowledged Will of God. On this Foot all Doubts are solved at once. For there is no one Point more sure than this; That the Creature is bound, at all Events, to comply with the Will of the Creator.

And so sensible were the wiser Heathens of what little Consequence it was, to pretend to argue the Generality of Mankind into the Practice of Duty, ---- or to refer them to *the Law of Nature* (which will ever be to *them* what they themselves shall make it), that they frequently pretended to a Divine Commission. This, where credited, had an Effect: But the Misfortune was, that Fact would not support such Pretensions, how expedient soever in Prudence it might be to make them.

166 S E R M O N V.

Upon the whole then, since nothing can be to *us* a Law, which is by us indiscoverable, it follows, that the Law of Nature can reach to those Points only, the Reasons of which are capable of being discerned by us : And forasmuch as the Capacities of different Men are, in this respect, various, this Law, as it regards different Men, must vary likewise. In short, it will be none other, than such a Collection of moral Rules, as each Person, according to the Circumstances he is placed in, is capable of framing for himself. Whether such a Law be entirely perfect, and such as supersedes all Occasions of farther Light and Direction, comes now to be considered under my Second general Head.

II. The entire Perfection of a Law will require, that it extend itself to every thing which is fit and proper Matter of that Law ; ---that the Meaning of it be clear, and the Promulgation full ;---that the Sanctions by which it is enforced be weighty, as to their Nature, and so expressly denounced, as to leave no Room for Doubt ; and, lastly, that the Law itself be so suited to the Circumstances of the World, as may afford Grounds to expect an unreserved Obedience to it.

Where

S E R M O N V. 167

Where any of these are wanting, we cannot say the Law is entirely perfect. Let us therefore try the *Law of Nature*, as before explained, by the Rules here mentioned.

I have observed already, that the Law of Nature doth and must vary with regard to particular Persons;---that the different Extent of their Capacities will create a like Difference in their Obligations; and, consequently, that those Precepts will become Parts of this Law to some, which are not so to others.

If this be true, it is plain, that it doth not extend itself to all those Points, which are fit and proper to be enacted; though some things, by being known, become Matter of Duty to some, and are therefore Parts of this Law;---but to others, who are incapable of knowing them, are no Matters of Duty, and therefore to *them* no Parts of it: Yet it must be confessed, that, in their own Nature, they are equally fit to be practised by both: For Men are, in this Case, obliged, because the Thing discovered was fit and proper to be done antecedently to such a Knowledge.

If Men indeed were capable, in every Circumstance, of having a full and perfect Comprehension of all that is fit and proper, then the Law of Nature would be perfect as

168 S E R M O N V.

to its Extent; because it would then take in every thing which could become Matter of that Law. But, in fact, the Case is otherwise. The wisest Philosophers have frequently contradicted each other;---have sometimes been wrong on both Sides; and where the Mistakes of former Writers have been corrected by the succeeding, the Imperfection of the preceding Scheme is apparent;---or, if you please, the *Law of Nature*, as taught and inculcated by those former Writers, hath been manifestly defective.

Who doth not know that the very same Men, under the mere Direction of their Reason, must necessarily frame to themselves a different Scheme of Duty in different Periods of Life? For this Scheme, depending on their Capacity of Knowledge, must likewise alter as Years increase, and greater Opportunities of learning are put into their Hands. But Change, in this Case, must suppose some sort of Defect or Imperfection; and if the Law of Nature, which Men had first formed for their Conduct, had been entirely perfect, there could have been no Room for any subsequent Changes or Improvements.

In short, since the *Law of Nature* is such
a Col-

S E R M O N V. 169

a Collection of moral Precepts as Men are able to discover in the Use of their own Reason, it follows, that this Law cannot be more perfect than their Reason itself is; it cannot extend to all things in themselves fitting and proper, any more than their Reason itself doth; but must unavoidably be of greater or less Extent to different Men, as the Means and Opportunities of using their Reason are more or less.

But beside that *the Law of Nature*, considered in this View, is defective as to its Extent, we may observe farther, that it is frequently obscure, even as to those Points into which Men have some sort of Insight. Some things are rather the probable than the certain Conclusions of Mens Reason; and others appear in so doubtful a Light, that they scarce know how to determine with Satisfaction to themselves. There are prudential Rules, indeed, which will teach Men how to behave tolerably in this Case: Such, for instance, are these; To forbear, if possible, to act on either Side;—or, if the Circumstances of things will not admit of this, then to chuse what, upon the whole, is safest, and attended with the fewest Inconveniencies. Every Man, to be sure, is concerned

170 S E R M O N V.

cerned to do as well as he can, and to make the most of that Light which he enjoys. But the Question here is, What, and how great, this Measure of Light is?—Whether every thing be plain and evident?—Whether Doubts may not arise, how far certain Matters are contained under the Law of Nature?—and Doubts of such a kind, that a well-meaning Person may sometimes be apt to err.

Will any Man affirm, that all those things, which are in every Circumstance fit to be done, have been always clear to all Mankind?—That no Points have ever arisen, according to their Views, disputable?—That every thing of a moral Nature hath been equally plain, even to the same Men, in the several Periods of Life? If not, then, since nothing is to any Man the Law of Nature, but what he is capable of discovering to be his Duty; and since his particular Reason is such, that every thing cannot appear in a strong and clear Light, it follows, that his Law itself must be, on that account, obscure.

Yet, though we should suppose the directive Part of this Law to be plain and indisputable, still it should be observed, that Men are naturally fond of Liberty: They care
not

S E R M O N V. 171

not to be tied up to any Rules, how fit and proper soever : They are influenced by a Variety of strong Passions ; solicited by almost every Object which surrounds them : And the mere Reason of the Thing, in such Circumstances as these, will have little Weight against Passion and Appetite. Hence appears the Necessity of enforcing good Rules by the Prospect of Rewards and Punishments.

Law-givers have been so sensible of this, that they have always annexed Sanctions to their Commands ; and it hath admitted of Dispute with some, whether such Sanctions are not even essential to a Law. But, however this Point be decided, yet surely it cannot be questioned, whether, in the present Condition of human Nature, Laws can obtain their Effect without them ? Whether it be not necessary to enforce, as well as to make known, the Rule ? And whether the Passions can be controuled without the Aids either of Hope or Terror.

To give this Law of Nature therefore its Effect, an Obedience to it must be guarded by proper Rewards and Punishments ; which, if they are not sufficiently distributed in this Life, must be expected in another. This then will carry us on to enquire, whether
human

172 S E R M O N V.

human Reason, I mean, the particular Reason of each individual Person, will make this Point of a future State indisputable: For, if it cannot do this, then the Practice of Duty will be insufficiently supported this Way; and *the Law of Nature*, as being destitute of unquestionable Sanctions, will appear to be so far defective.

A future State of Rewards and Punishments is, I must confess, capable of being proved by natural Arguments; and some of the wiser Heathens had reasoned themselves into the Belief of it, by such Considerations as are sufficient to convince a thoughtful and intelligent Person. But then it must be here observed, that Arguments have no Weight, but with those Persons by whom they are understood. If the Philosophers should satisfy *themselves* in this Point (which we find they could not always do), yet the Generality of Mankind are incapable of abstruse Reasonings. If these therefore cannot, for want either of Capacity or Opportunity, settle this Matter, and come to a firm and thorough Persuasion about it, what doth it signify that others, of greater Reach, have fixed it? As it is their own Reason which must form their Rule, so it is their own Reason

S E R M O N V. 173

Reason only which can lead them to an Enforcement by proper Sanctions.

I do admit indeed, that almost everywhere there hath prevailed some sort of Presumption of future Reward, and a certain Suspicion of future Punishment. No doubt but Advantages have arisen from hence; and the Practice of Virtue hath been greatly assisted by them. But then I would desire to know, whether Certainty, in a Point so concerning, be not preferable to mere Opinion; and whether the express Assurance which the Gospel gives us on this Head, be not an Advantage far above any thing which the mere Reason of ordinary Persons could supply them with. If this be allowed, then must we give *the Law of Revelation* the Preference to *the Law of Nature*; and maintain, that by how much the one exceeds, by so much doth the other fail.

Once more; The Law of Nature did not so suit the Circumstances and Condition of the World, as to afford Grounds for expecting an unreserved Submission to it. I shall mention Two things of Moment to be considered; *viz.* That it made no sufficient Provision in case Men had violated the known Rules of Duty; and, in the next place, that
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174 S E R M O N V.

it gave them no Assurances of higher Aid in performing those things, to which the Corruptions of human Nature had made them, in a great degree, unequal.

By the Law of Nature certain Duties were required; and, upon a strict Performance of them, Men had a Right to be treated as innocent. But what could this avail them, when they had violated this Law itself? Could they therefore be justified by the Terms of it? Could they expect Salvation in Virtue of a Law, by the Breach of which they had forfeited all Title to it? If this could not be, Men must seek farther for Consolation in this Case: And as natural Reason can by no means assure them on what Terms a Pardon may be had, so, under the Conduct of natural Reason, they must be left in sad Doubts and Perplexities.

Nor is this to be considered only as a State of Anxiety, from which every-one is concerned to be freed, if possible; but likewise as a sad Discouragement from making any vigorous Attempts towards a future Obedience. Every-one knows with how much Difficulty those are prevailed on to return to Duty, who apprehend their Case as desperate: And therefore the Ministry of our Blessed

S E R M O N V. 175

Blessed Lord was ushered in with the Preaching of Repentance, supported by the express Promises of Pardon. This gave Men new Heart and Courage : And when they were once possessed with a Persuasion of this Point, there was nothing too hard to be attempted.

But, though *the Spirit be willing, yet the Flesh is weak*. Men are compassed about with Infirmities ; and those things of which they see the Fitness, they yet either neglect wholly, or perform with great Measures of Imperfection. Something farther therefore is needful to carry on the Cause of Virtue, than the mere Knowledge and Acquaintance with our Duty. There must be some Principle of an higher Nature to keep a quick and lively Sense of these Things on our Minds ;--to aid our Resolutions ;--to weaken the Force of Temptations ; and to enable us to conquer the Difficulties before us.

How far the happy Circumstances of some particular Persons may have carried them, even without a Revelation, I will not say : But this is certain, that the greatest Part of Mankind have miserably failed : They were conscious of their own Weakness, and Imperfection, and Inability, to prosecute, in a constant and uniform Manner, those Ends, which their Reason had set before them.

176 S E R M O N V.

But what then, will our Adversaries say, Is not *the Law of Nature* the Law of God? And can any Law proceed from a Being of infinite Wisdom and Perfection, but what is *absolutely perfect*?

We may reply, by observing, That the Law of Nature is doubtless the Law of God; and without supposing it to be so, we shall be unable to prove it strictly obligatory; that is, to be, properly speaking, any Law at all. We may observe, in the next place, that every Law which God gives us, must be in a certain Sense perfect, or suited to the End for which it was given. The Law of Nature therefore is *perfect in its Kind*, and will answer those Purposes which a Law of that sort can answer. But it will not follow from hence, that it is *absolutely*, and in every respect, perfect. Every Species of Creatures is perfect;---perfect, I mean, in its Kind: But who will assert, that any Species is absolutely perfect? The same, which I have observed concerning the Creatures of God's Power, will equally hold as to the Prescriptions of his Will. They are both perfect in their Kind: But as the one, when compared with more noble Creatures, may be said to be *relatively imperfect*;---so may the other likewise,

S E R M O N V. 177

likewise, when compared with more excellent Dispensations.

I have observed before, that the Law of Nature cannot be more perfect, than our Reason itself is ; because it cannot reach farther than our Reason itself can carry us. Had God therefore created us with lower Degrees of Reason than we now enjoy, our Nature would still have been, *in its Kind, perfect* ; and the Law, which our Reason must, in such a Case, have taught us, would, in this Sense, have been perfect likewise. But, would it have been as perfect, or so extensive, as it is at present ? No, certainly : Several things, in themselves fitting, would have been unknown to us ; and there are some, now plain and evident, which would then have escaped our Notice. Should God add to us any new Faculties, new Measures of Duty would arise : Our Obligations would be different, and *the Law of Nature* enlarged. If this be true, then *the Law of Nature*, as it now subsists, neither is, nor can be, absolutely perfect.

Nor doth this at all derogate from the Wisdom and Perfection of the Supreme Being, the Author of this Law : For the Defects of it arise not from the Nature of God,

178 S E R M O N V.

but of the Creature : It hath a Power of obliging ; that is, It is properly a Law just so far as Men do, or may see the Reasons and Fitnesſes of Things : It fails therefore on this account only, becauſe Men themſelves are deficient and imperfect.

In that original State of Purity and Excellence in which Man was at firſt created, I queſtion not but it reached to every thing morally fit for Man, in thoſe Circumſtances, to do : But when our Nature became corrupt, the Underſtanding being darkened, and the Will perverted ; that is, when Men were funk beneath themſelves, then this Law itſelf ſuffered likewise. From that Time forward *the Law of Nature*, and the Rule of Fitneſs, were no longer commensurate to each other : And the former fell ſhort of the latter in proportion as human Capacities chanced to be impaired.

If it be ſaid, That God was concerned to preſerve his own Laws in their original Extent, by preventing ſuch Corruptions in human Nature as ſhould be prejudicial to them ; ---this is rather a bold Preſumption of what God ought to have done, than a proving what he actually hath done. And beſides, if any Allowance ſhould be made to the Argument,

S E R M O N V. 179

ment, it may be turned, I conceive, to our Advantage,---as shewing how fit and proper it was for the Supreme Being to aid the Imperfections of our Reason; and to restore and reinforce that Law by a special Revelation, which was, in a great degree, lost, through Ignorance and Error.

III. I am led from hence to my Third Head; *viz.* That an extraordinary Manifestation of the Divine Will, was, in these Circumstances, exceedingly wanted. This follows directly as a Consequence from what was observed before: For if the Light of Nature, in the present State of Things, and as it now subsists in each particular Man, be insufficient to discover a perfect Rule of Action, or to enforce this Rule by proper Sanctions, then it is plain we need some higher Aid. Men, in this Condition of Things, could not be brought to a tolerable Degree of moral Perfection, but either by enlarging their natural Abilities, and so altering the settled Course of Nature in reference to every individual Person;---or else by vouchsafing such a general Revelation, as might manifest and enforce our Duty,---and enable us (if we are not inexcusably negligent)

180 S E R M O N V.

gent) to master those Corruptions under which we labour. The former of these was needless, if the same End might be compassed in the latter Way.

The Use and Advantage of a Revelation, in this View of Things, will appear plainly. It is intended to settle those Points, which could not be settled by mere natural Light;—to prescribe, and make known, a common Rule of Life, which could not be fixed for the Generality of Mankind on any other Foot; ---to give Men Assurance of Divine Pardon for the Violation of known Duties, of which they could not get sufficient Assurance without it; ---to enforce a future Obedience by the best and most effectual Sanctions; ---and, lastly, by the Institution of an excellent Discipline, to guard the Practice of Virtue, and to put Men in a Method of subduing their corrupt Desires. These are the Ends of Revelation: And could all these, or indeed any of them, be sufficiently obtained without it? If not, then may we have Liberty to conclude, that mere human Reason, as it now subsists, is *an insufficient Guide in Matters of Religion.*

But, when I offer this Conclusion, I desire to be understood with Favour. I do by

S E R M O N V. 181

no means assert, that Men are strictly accountable for not performing those Actions, the Fitness of which they have neither Capacity nor Opportunity to discern. Without doubt God expects not to reap where he hath not sown; and, in consequence of this, the Apostle declares, that *the Times of Ignorance God winked at.* [*Acts xvii. 30.*] Thus far we allow, that natural Light is sufficient; *viz.* Men cannot reasonably be condemned for not rising to those Degrees of Perfection, to which the Light they enjoy cannot carry them. But then there is another Sense, in which we affirm, that the Light of Reason, as it now subsists in human Kind, is *insufficient*: It cannot direct Men to every thing morally fit and proper to be done: It cannot sufficiently enforce the uniform Practice of those things, the very Grounds of which it teaches: And when Men have erred through Carelessness or Obstinacy, it cannot assure them on what Terms the Supreme Being will be reconciled. Upon these, as well as several other accounts, we deny the *absolute* Sufficiency of human Reason in Matters of Religion; and, in consequence of this, we assert the Usefulness and Expediency of Divine Revelation.

182 S E R M O N V.

Several things have been sometimes said in Bar of this Conclusion, which cannot be distinctly considered in the Compass of One Discourse. However it will not be improper to take notice of One Objection, which (if there be any thing in it) must overthrow all at once which I have hitherto endeavoured to prove.

The Objection is this ; “ Had God, from time to time, spoke to all Mankind in their several Languages ;---and had his Words miraculously conveyed the same Ideas to all Persons ;---yet he could not speak more plainly, than he hath done by the things themselves, and the Relation which Reason shews there is between them : Nay, since it is impossible in any Book or Books, that a particular Rule could be given for every Case, we must even then have had Recourse to the Light of Nature to teach us our Duty in most Cases ; especially considering the numberless Circumstances which attend us, and which, perpetually varying, may make the same Actions, according as Men are differently affected by them, either good or bad *.”

Here the following Points are either covertly insinuated, or directly maintained ;

* See *Christianity as Old as, &c.* p. 27.

S E R M O N V. 183

viz. First, That a Revelation cannot answer our Purpose, unless it be made to all Mankind from time to time; that is, to every particular Person in all the several Ages of the World. In the next place, it must be made in all the several Languages used by different Persons in different Times and Places. Beyond this, the very Words, in which it is delivered, must miraculously convey the same Ideas to all Persons: And, if all these Circumstances should concur, yet still it can be of no manner of Service;—because God cannot speak more plainly by such a Revelation as this, than he hath already done by the things themselves. To which is added, in the last Place, That general Rules must always be explained by the Natures of Things; that these Rules therefore must necessarily refer us back to the Light of Reason; and, consequently, that the Light of Reason must be a better and more extensive Rule, than any Revelation can possibly be.

As to the First Thing alleged, there is no Necessity that a Revelation, if made, should be made directly to all Mankind, or repeated in the several Ages of the World. It is enough, if there be sufficient Evidence, that

184 S E R M O N V.

it hath ever been made at all ; and to expect more than this, is plainly unreasonable.

Nor is there any more Occasion, that it should be delivered to us in more Languages than one. Faithful Versions may be made by Men ; and of such Versions Men are sufficient Judges. This is allowed in all other like Cases ; and therefore ought equally to be admitted in this Case likewise.

Nor is it any more needful, that the Words in which a Revelation is delivered, should miraculously convey the same Ideas to each Person. Where Laws are expressed in a proper Manner (as we may assure ourselves a Revelation will always be), those concerned can fall into no important Errors, but thro' their own Fault. No miraculous Conveyance of Ideas is needful in the Case : By proper Care they will so far agree, at least, as to come into the same Sentiments on the important Affairs of Life.

The main Points in the Objection are still behind ; *viz.* That God cannot speak to us more plainly in a Revelation, than he hath already done by Things themselves ; and likewise, that the Light of Reason must be a better and more extensive Guide to us, than any Revelation can possibly be ;---because
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S E R M O N V. 185

the general Rules of Revelation must be explained by Reason; and, consequently, refer us back for more particular Instructions to the Light of Nature.

To say, that a Revelation must be useless and unserviceable, because God cannot speak to us more plainly by a Revelation, than he hath already done by things themselves, is a very bold Assertion, and such as ought not to be admitted without some sort of Proof. Surely this cannot pass for a Principle self-evident; and therefore, considering what great Matters are intended to be supported by it, something at least ought to be offered in its Confirmation: But, in reality, the Assertion is notoriously wrong, and will appear to be so on the very first Reflection. To speak to us by Things themselves, is to speak to us only in proportion to the Degrees of Reason we enjoy, and the Opportunities we have of using it. More or less clear therefore must Language of this kind be to us, as our Abilities are more or less. In this Way the same things cannot be equally clear to all Persons. But will any Man maintain, that no Revelation can make Matters of Duty equally clear to all? This surely is possible; and therefore God may, if he pleases, speak more plainly
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186 S E R M O N V.

by a Revelation, than he hath already done by the Natures of Things. Again; What is learnt by considering Things themselves, is learnt by Inference and Deduction; and this, in some Cases, by a long Train of Reasoning. But will any one insist, that the Sense and Meaning of a Conclusion cannot be made more clear to us, than the Force of those natural Arguments by which it may be proved? To affirm this, is to contradict the common Sense and Experience of the World.

Human Laws are, or ought to be, built on good Reasons; and, no doubt, they frequently are so. But is it not possible to express these Laws in so clear a manner;---to publish them so effectually;---and to make the Authority of them so apparent, that Subjects may learn what they ought to do from hence, better than by searching after the Reasons on which they are built? If this cannot possibly be done, then to what Purpose is it that human Laws are made at all? But, if this be the Case with regard to human Prescriptions, let us allow at least as much to the Divine; and say, That God may, by a Revelation, make things more plainly appear to us as Matters of Duty, than they could

S E R M O N V. 187

could by the mere Reasonings of our own Minds about them.

As to the next Thing objected, we admit, that all written Rules (as those delivered to us by Revelation are) must be expressed in general Terms : And how to apply them to particular Cases, is referred to Reason. Revelation therefore is not intended to exclude Reason, but to supply the Defects of it, in Matters to which it cannot reach, or to which the Circumstances of human Kind will not permit them to apply it. But where it can be used to Advantage, there the Use of it is either supposed or required. To give us Rules must, of itself, imply, that we are in some sort capable of judging by these Rules, and of using them for those Purposes for which they were given us. Will it then follow from hence, that because Reason is necessary, in order to make a proper Use of Revelation itself, therefore Reason is entirely sufficient without it ; and that we can receive no manner of Advantage from it ?

Let us apply this Arguing to another Case, and see how it will then appear. To aid the Shortness and Imperfection of our Sight, Artists have provided certain Instruments, in the Use of which vast Numbers of Objects are discovered

188 S E R M O N V.

discovered by us ;---and others, which were before, in some sort, exposed to View, are now seen more distinctly. But yet, in order to use these Instruments, the Faculty of Sight is necessary ; and we are required to exercise it in the Use and Application of these Instruments themselves. What then ! Is human Sight sufficient for these Purposes, without the Aid of any Instruments of this Kind,---because the Use of these Instruments supposes and requires the Exercise of Sight ? No, surely : The Argument is strictly the same in both Cases ; and therefore must be inconclusive, as well in the one, as in the other.

Perhaps this Matter may be clearer, by substituting Civil Law in the Room of those which are supernaturally revealed. These (as I have observed just before) are, or ought to be, built on Reason ; and therefore will be the Object of our Reason. We may observe besides, that when they are once enacted, forasmuch as they are expressed in general Terms, there will be a farther Use of Reason still. The Rules prescribed may require Limitations, and receive a Sense from rightly comparing them with their proper Ground or Foundation. But, notwithstanding this, will our Adversaries insist, that Civil Laws in general

S E R M O N V. 189

neral are superfluous ?---That the Office of a Magistrate is useless and insignificant ?---That every Man ought to be left to his own Determinations; and to direct his Actions by the Rule of private Will and Pleasure? If not, then the Objection before us vanishes: For it is utterly impossible to give any Weight to it, which shall not equally lie against all Civil Laws: And consequently, on this Foot of Arguing, Religion and Government must stand or fall together.

I shall go no farther on this Subject, how much soever it may deserve Enlargements. All that I shall note, is this; If the Principles I have advanced are true, the Consequence deduced is certain: A Revelation will be proper and expedient; which, as it answers to the Occasions of human Kind, must be entirely agreeable to the Divine Perfections.

Whether such a Revelation hath been vouchsafed, in fact, is another Question; but such a one withal as may be determined with the greatest Certainty. And if this may be done, and, which is more, *hath* been done, it remains, That we constantly recur to it;---that we study it with Diligence, and conform to it with Exactness;---that we consider it as a Treasure of sacred Knowledge,---as contain-

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190 S E R M O N V.

ing the present Measures of Conduct, and the surest Grounds of Expectation. As such, our Reason itself will teach us to value it; and, if we will not hearken to its Instructions, will hereafter censure us for neglecting them. How then can we hope to escape, when every Circumstance shall aggravate our Fault, —and we shall find our Condemnation in that very Principle to which we fly for Refuge!

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S E R M O N VI.

History of CAIN and ABEL.

IN TWO PARTS.

P A R T I.

GEN. iv. 3, 4, 5.

And in Process of Time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the Fruit of the Ground an Offering unto the Lord.

And Abel, he also brought of the Firslings of his Flock, and of the Fat thereof: And the Lord had Respect unto Abel, and to his Offering.

But unto Cain, and to his Offering, he had not Respect: And Cain was very wroth, and his Countenance fell.

THE Portion of Scripture, of which these Words are a Part, contains a very remarkable History; in which the First Man perhaps that was ever born, is represented

192 S E R M O N VI.

represented as a Murderer, and the First Person that ever died, as murdered. These were the sad Effects of *Adam's* Transgression. The Guilt of it was manifested in his First-born; and its mischievous Consequences in his Second.

It will be worth our while to examine this whole Piece of History with Care. It will not only afford us Matter for curious and entertaining Reflection, but prove useful in the Conduct of Life. I shall endeavour therefore to set it in a proper Light: I shall note those Particulars which are most worthy our Observation; and enlarge on such as are of more general Use, and will furnish us with apt Matter for Discourse.

It is probable that *Cain* was the eldest Son of our First Parents, and *Abel* the Second: At least nothing appears to the contrary.— But however this Point be decided, is not material. We are no farther concerned about it, than Curiosity may perhaps lead us to make Enquiries concerning the earliest Age of the World.

The First Particular which this History records, concerning these Two Persons Lives, is this; That they engaged in different Employments, suitable, no doubt, to their own Inclinations

S E R M O N VI. 193

Inclinations and Capacities. *Abel* was a Keeper of the Sheep, and *Cain* was a Tiller of the Ground. So far as this, each acted according to the strict Rules of Reason and Prudence. Even in *Paradise* itself Men were not to be idle: At the same time that the Fruits of the Earth were to be enjoyed, the Garden was to be cultivated: And Divine Bounty itself will not bestow Favours on us without our own Care and Pains. But Diligence and Industry, in some particular Callings, became much more necessary, when Men were driven out from that fruitful Spot of Earth, on which they were placed at first, and the Ground itself was accursed for their Sakes. Then were they obliged to earn the Necessaries of Life by the Sweat of their Brows, and to repair by Labour that Barrenness which they had brought on Nature.

It is remarked farther, that *in Process of Time each brought his proper Offering unto the Lord: The one, of the Fruits of the Ground; the other, of the Firstlings of his Flock.* Whether they were instructed in this Method of Worship by their Parent,---or led to it by their own Reason,---or commanded by express Revelation from God, is not said. Divine Worship in the general is so plainly founded

194 S E R M O N VI.

in the Reasons of Things, that no thinking Man can be ignorant of this Duty : And this Form of Worship, by offering Sacrifices, hath obtained so much in the several Parts and Ages of the World, that we can hardly account for it otherwise, than by supposing, that it was originally founded on some Divine Revelation made to the first Men, and from them delivered down to their several Successors. However this be, yet, Divine Worship being so clear and certain a Duty, we cannot but approve so far the Conduct of these Two Persons : And had they taken equal Care to express their Regard to God in a proper Manner, they would have been equally accepted by him : But, in fact, this proved otherwise. It is not exceedingly clear in what the Difference consisted. It can hardly be thought, that *Abel's* Sacrifice was more acceptable than *Cain's*, merely because the Sacrifice offered was of a more noble Kind. Each brought of those Goods which were proper to his own Employment : And it appears, that, by the *Jewish* Law, Sacrifices of the Fruits of the Ground were afterwards required by God. It is not improbable (and it seems to be suggested in the History itself), that there was a main Difference in this ; *viz.* That *Cain* offered

S E R M O N VI. 195

ferred the vile and refuse, and *Abel* the most precious Part of his Treasures. Thus it is said of the one, *That he brought* [barely] *of the Fruits of the Ground*; of the other, *That he brought of the Firslings of his Flock, and of the Fat of them*. If this were truly the Case, the Sacrifice of *Abel* was therefore more acceptable than *Cain's*, because it expressed a more grateful Sense of the Divine Goodness.

To this may be added, that probably the general Course of *Cain's* Life was vicious and immoral; and the very offering up his Sacrifice was not attended with that Devotion which was necessary. The Conjecture proposed may receive some Confirmation from observing what the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, [*Heb. xi. 4.*] *By Faith Abel offered unto God a more acceptable Sacrifice than Cain; by which he obtained Witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his Gifts*. And *St. John* [*1 John iii. 12.*] more fully declares, *That Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his Brother: And wherefore slew he him? Because his own Works were evil, and his Brother's righteous*.

To proceed: The Text tells us, *That the Lord had Respect unto Abel, and to his Offering: But unto Cain, and his Offering, he*

196 S E R M O N VI.

had not Respect. How this Approbation as to the one, and Dislike as to the other, was shewn, is not expressly said. It is the general Opinion, that it was manifested by Fire coming down from Heaven, and consuming the Sacrifice of *Abel*; whilst *Cain* received no such Mark of Favour. This Method of expressing the Divine Acceptance, is afterwards mentioned in several Passages of Scripture. Thus [*Levit. ix. 23, &c.*] *The Glory of the Lord appeared unto all the People. And there came Fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the Altar the Burnt-offering, and the Fat: Which when all the People saw, they shouted, and fell upon their Faces. And* [*1 Chron. xxi. 26.*] *when David offered Burnt-offerings and Peace-offerings, and called upon the Lord, he answered him from Heaven by Fire, upon the Altar of the Burnt-offering.* The same may be observed in the Case of *Elijah* contending with the false Prophets [*1 Kings xviii. 38.*] and of *Solomon* at the Dedication of the Temple [*2 Chron. vii. 1.*] This Account indeed appears to be probable; for it is clear from this History, that God signified, in some visible and eminent Manner, his Acceptance of *Abel*, and Disapprobation of *Cain*; since it immediately follows, That
Cain

S E R M O N VI. 197

Cain was exceeding wroth, and his Countenance fell. No Account can be given of this Excess of Passion, but by supposing some eminent Difference to be made by God between these Two Persons : And the Divine Conduct afterwards, on other like Occasions, is a sufficient Reason to think, that God did signify his Pleasure by a miraculous Descent of Fire.

The Account however which I have here given, is not intended to exclude any other Solution of this Question ; especially if it be consistent with what hath been offered already, and built on a like probable Proof. Let us consider therefore, how the Providence of God often exercises itself with regard to good and bad Men ; and what Promises or Threats have been expressly made in the Holy Scriptures. The Hopes of worldly Happiness, and the Fears of worldly Distress, are frequently insisted on in the Old Testament as proper Motives to Obedience ; nor are they entirely neglected even in the New. In consequence of this, we find, that as often as the *Israelites* rebelled against God, he gave them up into the Hands of their Enemies ; and, as soon as they returned to the Practice of their Duty, he vouchsafed them some mi-

198 S E R M O N VI.

raculous Deliverance, as a Mark of Reconciliation.

From this View of the Conduct of Providence in succeeding Times, we may infer (with some Shew of Reason at least), that the Acceptance and Disapprobation of God in reference to these Two Persons, were farther manifested, by bestowing the Blessing of Prosperity on the one,---and by blasting the Hopes and Expectations of the other : That *Abel*, as a Reward of his Piety, was blessed with a double Increase of his Folds ; and that *Cain*, as a Punishment for his Sin, might be cursed with thin and unfruitful Harvests. This is the more likely, because so considerable a Part of the Punishment inflicted for the Sin of our First Parents, consisted in their being driven out from the fruitful Garden of *Eden*, and the Earth being rendered barren.

To this we may add, That this additional Solution of the Question gives a farther Account, why we may suppose so extreme a Passion should be raised on this Occasion. Every one, who is at all acquainted with the State of human Nature, must observe, how Men are apt to be affected by the Success and Prosperity of others ; especially when they themselves labour under any remarkable Disappointment.

S E R M O N VI. 199

appointment. The Character of *Cain*, as we have Reason to conjecture, was such, as did not mightily dispose him to Religion and the Discharge of his Duty. He seems to have contented himself with the bare outward Performance of his Sacrifice, being little concerned whether his Offering were such as might prove acceptable to God. If this were the Case, however we may suppose him to have been affected for the present by the Miracle of Fire coming down from Heaven, yet it is not likely that this alone should make such deep and lasting Impressions. We shall be rather led to imagine, that this proceeded from a Cause more apt to work on a Person of his Temper; that, as the Care and Concerns of the World took up all his Thoughts, so he was transported with so great a Passion, by some eminent Disappointment this way; In short, that he could not bear the Success and Prosperity of his Brother, whilst he himself laboured under notorious Crosses and Misfortunes.

It is added, *That Cain was very wroth, and his Countenance fell.* The Occasion I have just observed. It will be proper to note here, that there was no sufficient Reason for him to be dissatisfied or angry with his Brother at

200 S E R M O N VI.

all; and much less to give such way to a Passion, troublesome to himself, and pernicious to others. The Prosperity of his Brother was no Injury to him. It was occasioned by his having duly performed his several Offices; and particularly by his devout and religious Behaviour in offering up his Sacrifice.

What was there in all this which could justify such Resentment? He should rather have learnt, from the Observations he had made, to correct his own past Errors; to remove his Misfortunes by repenting of his Sins; and to have recommended himself to the Favour of God, by an Imitation of his Brother's Example. The Judgments of God are intended by him to lead us to Repentance: He delighteth not to grieve us; and, when he lays his afflicting Hand on us, it is designed to awaken us to a Sense of our Condition. Thus, in the very midst of Judgment, he thinketh upon Mercy; and the Punishments which are inflicted in this Life, are graciously intended for our Advantage in another. Happy would it have been for the Person we are now treating of, had he made this proper Use of his Misfortunes: But, it seems, a mad Passion blinded him:

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S E R M O N VI. 201

He went on to add Sin to Sin, and to cut off the very Possibility of Repentance. And yet, as numerous as his Offences had been, and great as the present Provocation was, the Divine Mercy was still greater. God was pleased to condescend so far, as to expostulate the Matter with him. *Why, saith he, art thou wroth? And why is thy Countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, Sin lieth at thy Door.* One might have imagined, that this would have corrected his Extravagance. So gracious a Representation of the Case must be sufficient to allay his present Heat; or, if it were not attended with this Effect, it must render him the more inexcusable.

We may consider these Words, either as setting forth the true Reason of *Cain's* Misfortunes; or else, as directing him what Use and Improvement he ought to make of them. If they are considered in the former View, then they represent the Unreasonableness of his present Anger against his Brother. All the Disappointments he met with, are here charged home upon himself. *If thou doest thy Duty, shalt thou not be accepted?---and receive the same Marks of Approbation which*
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202 S E R M O N VI.

have been vouchsafed unto thy Brother? But, *if thou doest not well, Sin* [that is, the Punishment of Sin] will constantly attend thee.

The Words may otherwise be considered as a Direction how he ought to behave for the future; and as a kind of Promise, that his past Sins should be forgiven him on his Repentance. To what purpose is it to disquiet thyself; and, by thy Impatience, to aggravate the Evils which thou endurest? Rather consider, that they are the Punishments of thy Crimes; and know, that, as Sin hath been the Occasion of thy Calamities, so Repentance must be their Cure. If thou reformest, shalt thou not be accepted?--But, if thou persistest in the same Course of Provocations, expect to suffer a greater Train of Evils.

What Effect this gracious Condescension of the Divine Being had for the present, is not mentioned. It is not unlikely but it might allay a present Heat, and inspire his Mind with more moderate and becoming Sentiments. But vain is it to expect, that a Man, habitually wicked, should on a sudden thoroughly change his Mind: The evil Principles, which he hath long entertained, will be ready to betray themselves on most Occa-

S E R M O N VI. 203

sions; and, unless a Man's Resolutions are exceedingly firm, it is odds but his wicked Inclinations are discovered in new Instances of Sin.

This seems to have been the Case before us. The Extravagancies of Passion were indeed checked, but not conquered: *Cain's* malicious Intentions were rather dissembled than suppressed; and Art is made use of the more effectually to bring about his Design.

Thus the History tells us [ver. 8.] *And Cain talked with Abel his Brother: And it came to pass, when they were in the Field, that Cain rose up against Abel his Brother.* An Appearance of Good-will was put on: They entered into Discourse with each other; and Designs the most barbarous that can be imagined, were covered under the Disguise of Friendship. But Wickedness is often artful, as well as desperate; and Men shew a Policy in ruining themselves.

The Event discovered the Intentions of *Cain.* *It came to pass, when they were in the Field, that he rose up against Abel his Brother, and slew him.* Thus his Impiety at length ended in Murder: One Sin draws on another: A Disregard to God naturally shews itself in a Hatred to Man: And it is vain to
hope,

204 S E R M O N VI.

hope, that he, who hath a Contempt of Religion, will retain the Sentiments of Humanity. We may in this Example see the gradual Progress of Sin. The First Crime mentioned was a Disregard of sacred Matters : This was followed by Envy, and Murmuring against God ; and at last finished by the impious and inhuman Murder of his Brother. — A Crime at which Nature starts ; and the very mention of which is enough to fill every ingenuous Mind with Horror.

As Man was made in the Image of God, so to rob him of Life unjustly, is a sort of Attempt on the Supreme Being, in whose Image he was made. Not to insist on the severe Laws which were afterwards prescribed to guard us against this Sin,----let us only consider, that human Nature is in all Ages much the same ; and that the very Frame of our Minds is such, as disposes us to preserve as well the Lives of others, as our own. Pity is one of the strongest Passions implanted in us. The *ordinary* Distresses of our Fellow-creatures, are apt to affect us : And every Mind, not entirely debauched, is led to use its best Endeavours, rather to remove than to increase them. It gives a Man Concern to hear or read of barbarous Actions ; and it
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S E R M O N VI. 205

is one of the worst Characters of the Devil himself, *That he was a Murderer from the Beginning.*

Still, great as this Crime was in its own Nature, it was farther heightened by the aggravating Circumstances which attended it. Here was the Murder, not barely of an innocent, but a religious Person; and the Motive to the Crime was, because *his own Works were wicked, and his Brother's righteous.* The Religion of the one upbraided the Impiety of the other; and the Success to which his Religion entitled him, exposed him as well to the Envy, as to the Hatred of *Cain.*

Thus the Sufferings of *Abel* being occasioned, in some measure, by his Religion, he may be considered as a Martyr in his Death; and this impious Act of *Cain* implies in it the Guilt, as well of Persecution as of Murder.

There is One Circumstance more, which it will be proper for us to observe; and that is, the near Relation which there was between the Murderer and the Murdered. They were Brothers; and probably the First that were ever born in the World. That strong Affection and Tenderness, which is implanted in us towards those of our own Kind,

206 S E R M O N VI.

Kind, generally shews itself in proportion to the Nearness of Kindred : And by how much the stronger this Principle is, by so much the more inexcusable must be so notorious a Violation of it.

A Crime so horrid as that of Murder ; the Murder of a Brother ; upon no Provocation ; and upon such Motives as should rather have determined him to the contrary, —we might fairly presume (without the Informations of History) would engage the Interposition of Providence. Thus, in fact, it did ; and the Particulars of God's Proceedings on this Occasion are set down in this History. But God is merciful in his Judgments, and tender in his Proceedings, even *when he maketh Inquisition for Blood*. He proceedeth not immediately to execute the Rigours of Justice ; but endeavours to bring the Offender to a Sense of his Condition.

Accordingly he is represented as making Enquiry of *Cain*, what was become of *Abel* : —*And the Lord said unto him, Where is Abel thy Brother ?* [ver. 9.] An Enquiry of this Nature, made by a Being from whom no Secrets can be hid, should, one might think, have induced him to reflect a little on what was past. It should have brought his Crime
into

S E R M O N VI. 207

into Remembrance ; and have prevailed with him rather to have intreated Pardon, than to have evaded the Question ; or, by any little Shifts, to endeavour the Concealment of his Guilt.

The Murderer however was impious in his Answer :---*I know not*, says he : *Am I my Brother's Keeper ?* — Thus adding both Falshood and Insolence to all his other Crimes ; and, in a manner, defying the Deity in his own more immediate Presence. But vain are all Attempts of this kind. Infinite Knowledge cannot be imposed on ; and infinite Power cannot be defied with Safety. Great Crimes cry aloud for Vengeance. God is not, and cannot be, a Stranger to our Actions : And his Arm is not shortened, that he cannot punish.---*What*, saith he, *hast thou done ? The Voice of thy Brother's Blood cryeth from the Ground.* Though there should be no living Witness of thy Guilt beside thyself, yet thine own Conscience cannot but accuse thee ; and the Almighty Judge of Heaven and Earth is himself a Spectator of thy Crimes. In vain is it to hope for Impunity. The innocent Blood which thou hast shed, crieth aloud for Vengeance, and hath entered into the Ears of the Lord of Hosts.

Thus

208 S E R M O N VI.

Thus we see, upon extraordinary Occasions, God is pleased to take extraordinary Measures; and to reveal the secret Sins of Men for the Punishment of the Evil-doer, and the Praise of his own Justice. He doth not indeed, in the present Age of the World, discover himself in so astonishing a manner as formerly;---nor are Miracles made use of to correct or punish the Extravagancies of Mankind. Still God is not unconcerned in human Affairs: He rules us with a Power real, though it be secret; and directs the Affairs of Nature by a Hand unseen.

To this purpose those Crimes of Men, which are committed with the utmost Secrecy, are generally discovered by the Conduct of Providence. The Darkeness can no more screen the Sinner now than formerly; but Deeds of Horror are (we scarce know how) brought forth into that Light which they cannot bear. Few Men, guilty of prodigious Crimes, can long conceal their Guilt: Their own Minds, oppressed with Sin, and unable to support the Load, have betrayed the secret Cause of their Anguish; and their own unfaithful Tongues have witnessed against them. Whilst Men have been unable to bear up under the Sense of Guilt, they
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S E R M O N VI. 209

have courted the very Punishments which they deserved; and, from the Severity of Justice, have sought Relief against the Horrors of their own accusing Consciences.

Thus does it happen when God's Arrows stick fast in them, and his Hand presseth them sore: Or, if no Agonies of this Nature disturb the Mind, yet Guilt is always timorous: The Care which it takes to conceal itself, creates a Suspicion of something bad; and leads Men on (however undiscernably) to betray their own Crimes. Artful as a wicked Man can possibly be to hide the mighty Secret of his Sin, yet equal Art will be used to disclose it: And it is odds but, by some Circumstance or other, the Truth breaks forth. No Man can be equally guarded on all Sides. There will be always some Marks; which an heedful Observer will improve; and Hints, however distant, will be taken, and gradually lead to a more complete and full Discovery. No Security therefore can be had in any Actions, but those which dare the Light. Sin will either discover itself, or be discovered. The Blood of an *Abel* will cry aloud from the Earth; and almighty Vengeance will pursue the Murderer.

And now, saith God, thou art cursed from

210 S E R M O N VI.

the Earth, which hath opened her Mouth to receive thy Brother's Blood from thy Hand. When thou tillest the Ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her Strength : A Fugitive and a Vagabond shalt thou be in the Earth [ver.

11, 12.] This was the Judgment which God pronounced on *Cain*. The Crime was great, and the Punishment dreadful. Let us take Warning by this Example ; and never provoke the Vengeance then inflicted, by imitating the Sins then committed. The First Murderer was cursed from the Earth : Judgments of almost every kind were to follow him : He was to be vexed with Horror of Conscience within, and Misfortunes from abroad : The Ground, by whose Fruits he was to be supported, was no more to yield its Strength ; and he was to be punished in that very respect, which, probably, was a main Inducement to his Crime.

It hath been before remarked, that the Disappointments which he might meet with in his proper Calling, probably transported him in so extravagant a Manner against his innocent, but more prosperous, Brother. A Person, whose Affections are too deeply fixed on the World, is very apt to run into Excesses of Passion, when he is crossed in that
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S E R M O N VI. 211

very Particular in which his greatest Concerns lie : But Punishments are often suited to Mens Crimes : The Covetous are crossed in their Hopes of Gain ; and the Ambitious in their Pursuits of Honour.

Thus, in like manner, if the Extravagance of *Cain* was occasioned by Envy at the Prosperity of his Brother, whilst his own covetous Expectations were crossed,----the Judgment inflicted pointed out the Original of his Crime. It was principally occasioned by his exorbitant Desire of Gain ; and it was punished by the Loss of those very Advantages, which he pursued with so irregular a Passion. Nor was this all : He was to be driven out from the Society of Men, with whom he could not be safely permitted to live ; and to wander from Place to Place, uncertain and unfixed, dreadful to others, and yet more a Terror to himself. How did the Ghost of his murdered Brother haunt his Imagination, make his Days heavy, and his Nights unquiet ?---A Sword of Vengeance seem constantly threatening, and heighten his Miseries by not accomplishing the Vengeance which it threatened ?

Greater, says he, is my Punishment than I can bear. Great it was, no doubt ; and yet,

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212 S E R M O N VI.

without Repentance, it must prove but the Foretaste of something worse. The Displeasure which God bears to Sin, is, in some measure, manifested by those Punishments which naturally attend it : But heavier far is that Wrath, which shall certainly be revealed at the last Day, when Sinners shall seek to the Rocks to hide them, and call upon the Hills to cover them from the Terrors of Almighty Power.

Behold thou hast driven me out from the Face of the Earth. A grievous Consideration to every Person who hath any Taste of the Pleasures of Society : But yet this is far less than a Banishment from the Divine Presence ; that which must be the Spring of every solid Joy. How heavily must his Hours pass away, who hath nothing to support him under present Evils, or the Prospect of future ; who feels more than Nature unassisted can bear, and yet dreads what is infinitely worse ;---whose gloomy Mind, being conscious of the Evil it hath done, fears the Punishments which it deserves, and makes even possible Calamities *certain and present*. Such is the Case of a wicked Mind, deserted by God, and suffered to exercise its own Cruelty upon itself.

It shall come to pass, saith Cain, that every

S E R M O N VI. 213

one that seeth me shall slay me [ver. 14.] Thus, we see, he was not only burthened with the Sense of present Evil, but suspicious of what was farther yet to come. Every Crime naturally suggests to us some Punishment attending it: But the Horror of Blood shed unjustly, will make Men suspect the Danger even of their own Lives. And, in truth, it is no Wonder that the common Enemies of Mankind should expect to be treated as Enemies; and imagine, that the rest of the World will be apt to purchase their own Security at their Expence. A Life, forfeited in this manner, must, according to the common Course of Things, be in continual Danger: And Fears, thus grounded, will supply the Room of that Punishment which is feared. A great Man hath very truly observed, that it is much better to suffer Death once, than to dread it always.

However, as the World was as yet unpeopled, God would not permit the Life of *Cain* to be taken away: He could avenge his Crime a thousand secret Ways; and make the Life, which he spared, a Punishment to itself. He was pleased therefore to guard him from Violence by the Threats of a Seven-fold Vengeance; and to set a Mark upon

214 S E R M O N VI.

Cain, *lest any-one finding him should kill him* [ver. 15.] What this Mark was, is not agreed by Interpreters. Probably it might be such a one as at once answered the Purposes of Punishment, and secured him from human Vengeance.

We may therefore fairly suppose, that it consisted in a certain Horror of Countenance, occasioned by the inward Horror of his Mind, which proved, at the same time, the Sign and Punishment of his Guilt. This must affect every Spectator with a very lively Concern: It must deter Men from the Commission of the like Sin; and make the wretched *Cain* a living Warning to the World. *So he went out from the Presence of the Lord*; was banished from his Favour, and the comfortable Influences of his Grace; the Punishment, which he deserved, was now executed upon him; a Wrath, which however heavy at present, yet, without Repentance, the Earnest of something greater.

Thus, having gone through with the History proposed, it will be proper to make some Application of it to ourselves; and to shew the standing Use which Histories of this kind afford us. *Whatever things were written aforetime, were written for our Instruction:*
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S E R M O N VI. 215

We should learn to correct our own Lives, by observing the Errors of others; and avoid their Crimes, if we desire to escape their Punishments. History, as it is the plainest, so is it the most forceable Way of Teaching; and, whilst it makes Things clear to the Understanding, it influences and bends the Will.

If *Cain* then so highly offended God by performing his Sacrifice in an irregular Way, ---we should learn not to rest in the mere outward Forms of Religion; but endeavour to worship God, in that Manner which he prescribes, and with those Dispositions which he requires: If God was pleased to signify his Disapprobation of *Cain* in an extraordinary Manner, and particularly by with-holding the Blessings of Life;---then let us not expect Success in our Affairs, otherwise than by recommending ourselves to the Favour of that Being on whom it must depend: If Envy at the Prosperity of his Brother transported this wicked Person to such Excesses, and led the Way to that horrid Crime which he afterwards committed;---then let us learn to guard against the first Approaches of this Passion with a watchful and religious Care: If no little Methods of concealing his Guilt could

216 S E R M O N VI.

screen the Murderer, but God vouchsafed to reveal the Crime he sought so industriously to conceal ;---then let us assure ourselves, that all our Actions are, in like manner, open to God's Eye ; that, by some means or other, they will certainly be brought to Light ; and the Evil which a Man hath committed, shall fall upon his own Head : If the Punishments inflicted for this Crime were so extreme, and the Agonies of Guilt so great, as to make him cry out, *That his Sin was greater than he could bear* ;---then let us take Warning by this Example : Let us not provoke the Divine Vengeance, which we can neither escape nor bear. The Patience of God, great as it is, may be wearied out ; and the Mercy which delays Punishment for the present, will in time heighten those Miseries which it could not prevent. In a Word, the Goodness of God in giving us this Warning, and pressing us to attend heedfully unto it, will make the Danger of neglecting it the greater ; and, *because there is Mercy with God, therefore he should be feared.*

Now to God the Father, God the Son,
Ec. Amen.

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S E R M O N VII.

History of CAIN and ABEL.

P A R T II.

GEN. iv. 3, 4, 5.

And in Proceſs of Time it came to paſs, that Cain brought of the Fruit of the Ground an Offering unto the Lord.

And Abel, he alſo brought of the Firſtlings of his Flock, and of the Fat thereof: And the Lord had Reſpect unto Abel, and to his Offering.

But unto Cain, and to his Offering, he had not Reſpect: And Cain was very wroth, and his Countenance fell.

I HAVE taken Occaſion, in a former Diſcourſe on theſe Words, to treat concerning the Hiſtory of the Two Perſons mentioned in the Text. There are ſeveral Things remarkable in their Conduct: The Behaviour of the Supreme Being towards them is worthy
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218 S E R M O N VII.

our Observation ; and I have drawn several Inferences from hence of Use to us in the Government of our Lives.

But, as such a fruitful Subject as this before us is incapable of being fully treated of in a single Discourse, I shall therefore desire Liberty to resume it ; to explain myself more distinctly on some Particulars ; and to make the Whole (if I can) of more Service and Advantage to my Hearers.

The Points which I design to handle at present, were just suggested formerly, as Matters of Instruction which ought to be drawn from the History before explained.

The First is built on a Supposition, That *Cain* had really offended God by the irregular Circumstances of offering up his Sacrifice. This appears from the Text itself : For, it is said, *Unto Cain, and his Offering, God had not Respect* : And afterward, when God was pleased to expostulate the Matter with this passionate and impious Man, he did it in these Words :—*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted ? But if thou doest not well, Sin lieth at thy Door.* It cannot be supposed, that he sinned merely in offering up a Sacrifice : Divine Worship is a natural Duty ; and this particular Form of it probably arose from a

S E R M O N VII. 219

Divine Appointment. The Offence therefore must arise from something or other irregular in the Performance ; from the Want of some Circumstances with which it might, and ought to have been attended.

The Instruction we should learn from hence, is this ; Not to rest in the mere outward Forms of Religion,---but endeavour to worship God in that Manner which he prescribes, and with those Dispositions which he requires.

Cain probably (if he troubled himself at all about Religion) thought it was enough that he had *brought of the Fruit of the Ground an Offering unto the Lord*. He seems to have been little curious *what* he offered : There is no mention in the Text of his bringing the First-fruits ; the best and most valuable Part of his Harvest : This was reserved for his own private Use ; and he cared not to part with it, tho' in Sacrifice to the Honour of his Maker.

It is not sufficient for us, that we perform the outward Ceremonies of Divine Worship. These indeed are necessary ; but not sufficient without the inward Devotion of the Mind : *Lying Lips are an Abomination unto the Lord*. This holds true in all our Concerns ; but especially in those in which we transact with
God

220 S E R M O N VII.

God himself. *When we draw near to him with our Mouth, but our Thoughts are far from him; when we put on the outward Form, without having the Power of Godliness, --- What do we other, than endeavour to impose on infinite Wisdom? We express a Contemptible Notion of those Perfections which we cannot sufficiently praise, --- and affront God in the very Act of our Adoration.*

Our Blessed Saviour declares to us (what we might learn, in some measure, from common Reason), *That God is a Spirit; and they who worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.* Whilst we ourselves continue in the Body, we shall find it necessary to worship God with bodily Worship; it is suitable to our present Condition and Circumstances: But then we must remember, that our Nature consists of a Soul, as well as a Body; and that God hath a Right to the Service of the Spirit too: Both Parts of us are equally redeemed by Christ; and, *because we are bought with a Price, therefore must we worship God in our Body and our Spirit, which are his.*

Sacrifices were probably instituted by God himself. In these something was offered up to God, as an Acknowledgement from whom we derived, and by whose Providence we
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S E R M O N VII. 221

hold the rest. Not that the Supreme Being hath any Need of costly Oblations ; *The whole World is his, and all that is therein :* But they were proper to be offered on our Part ; and were to be considered not as useful or serviceable to God,---but as a Tribute to be paid by Man.

Since the Coming of Christ, Sacrifices have ceased ; and the Worship we are now to pay, consists in Prayer and Praise : And yet, can our Prayers or Praises be of any Service to God ? Can he gain any thing by the Submission and Prostration of poor Mortals ? No, certainly ; and therefore we worship *him*, because it is fit and proper we should do so ; because it is a Matter becoming *us*, though entirely unserviceable to *him*.

But then, when I assert, that it is becoming us to apply ourselves to God in the Way of Prayer and Praise, it must still be remembered, that the Heart and Affections must always accompany our Words. *Cain* brought his Sacrifice, such as it was, and offered it up unto the Lord : But yet, if he did nothing more than perform the outward Ceremony, the Sacrifice was imperfect ; and, whilst it was so, how could he hope for the Divine Acceptance ? Unto *him* therefore, and his Sacrifice,

222 S E R M O N VII.

Sacrifice, God *had no Respect* : It provoked his Anger, instead of gaining his Approbation.

I must observe farther, That as a sincere and ardent Devotion is necessary, in order to recommend our religious Performances to God ;---so in all those Cases, in which he hath been pleased to prescribe the Particulars of his Worship, we must adhere inviolably to his Will ; we are not our own, but *his* ; and therefore are bound to serve him, not in the Way which our own Fancies may suggest to us, but in *that* which his Word directs us. Possibly *Cain* had offended in this Particular : If God required the *First-fruits*, and this perverse Offender would offer nothing but the Vile and Refuse,---he preferred his own Will before the Command of his Maker ; he presumed to judge more wisely of religious Worship than God himself ; and therefore drew down a Curse by that very Performance which was intended to procure a Blessing.

All the natural Duties,---or those which may be learned from the common Use of Reason, must be performed by us with the utmost Care : But those which we may call *positive Institutions*, are by no means to be omitted.

S E R M O N VII. 223

omitted. There are many wise Reasons (more than perhaps occur to us)----why Institutions of this kind should be given us : And, without enquiring into the Ground and Reason of such Commands, it is enough to observe, that God's Authority over us is absolute ; and it becomes us rather to obey readily, than to dispute presumptuously.

What, though we knew not the Reasons, why Christ required that those who were to be admitted into his Church, should be admitted by the Form of Baptism ? Or, that those who commemorated his Death, should do it by eating Bread, and drinking Wine ?---Should any Man dare to violate these Institutions ?---If God hath a Right to prescribe a Duty, hath he not an equal Right to prescribe the Manner ? In short (without entering farther into this Matter), the great Point of Religion consists in an entire Submission of ourselves to God. He who scruples to submit in any Case, virtually renounces the Divine Authority over him : He deserts God, and therefore will be deserted by him.

Once more : I have formerly noted, that, in all Probability, the general Course of *Cain's* Life was vicious and immoral ; and this may be grounded on these Words of *St. John*

[1 *John*

224 S E R M O N VII.

[1 John 3. 12.] *Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his Brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own Works were evil, and his Brother's righteous.* If this were the Case, we need not wonder that his Sacrifice proved unacceptable to God. *The Sacrifice of a wicked Man* (as the Wise Man tells us) *is an Abomination unto the Lord.* He requires pure Hands, and an holy Heart; and cannot behold Iniquity with Approbation. When therefore we draw near to God; that is, pretend to address our Worship to him, we must consider before whom we are about to present ourselves: We must remember these memorable Words of the Psalmist; *I will wash mine Hands in Innocency, and so will I come unto thine Altar.* He who doth otherwise, mocks, instead of adoring, God; — defiles the holy Place, and turns his very Prayer into Sin.

I pass on to a Second Observation on the History of *Cain*, formerly suggested; and this is built on the Judgment which immediately befel him on the Violation of his Duty. It is likely, that God with-held from him the common Blessings of Life; and cursed him with thin and unfruitful Harvests. From hence we should learn, not to expect Success

S E R M O N VII. 225

cess in our Affairs otherwise than by recommending ourselves to the Favour of that Being on whom it must depend.

God exercises a wise and just Providence over the whole World : As there is nothing done which escapes his Observation, so nothing happens without his Permission at least. *He formeth the Light, and createth Darknes; He maketh Peace, and createth Evil : It is the Lord who doth all these Things [Isai. xlv. 7.]* A Providence might be inferred from the Consideration, that God first created all things ; for the same Reasons which induced the Supreme Being to produce the World, are equally cogent for the Preservation of it ; and he, who is infinite in Wisdom and Goodness, ---Justice and Power, can never permit the Affairs of this World to be carried on without any Direction or Superintendency. If he be *wise*, he knows how to manage all things ; ---if he be *good*, he must be induced to manage all things for the best ;---if he be *just*, he must make a suitable Distinction between the Righteous and the Sinner ;---if he be *powerful*, he is able, without the least Difficulty, to bring to Effect every *wise*, and *good*, and *just* Purpose : So that, from this View of the Matter, it is unavoidable, but a Pro-

226 S E R M O N VII.

vidence there *must* be, and God's Care must be continually exercised over all his Works.

But what I am concerned more especially to remark under this Head, is this; That, as the Supreme Being exercises a Providence over us, so the Blessings or the Misfortunes of Life may be expected in proportion as Men discharge or violate their Duty. Under the *Jewish* Law there were many express Promises of temporal Blessings to Obedience, — and many severe Threats of temporal Curses to Disobedience.---Thus, said *Moses*,---*If thou shalt hearken unto the Voice of the Lord thy God, blessed shalt thou be in the City,---and blessed in the Field;---blessed in the Fruit of thy Body,---and the Fruit of thy Ground;---in thy Basket and thy Store;---when thou comest in, and when thou goest out:---Thine Enemies that rise up against thee, shall be smitten before thy Face; they shall come out against thee One Way, and flee before thee Seven Ways. On the contrary, If thou wilt not hearken unto the Voice of the Lord thy God, then every Curse shall attend thee, whether in the City or the Field; ---in thy Basket and thy Store:---In short, The Lord shall send upon thee Cursing, Vexation, and Rebuke, in all that thou settest thine Hand unto. Thy Heaven, which is over*
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S E R M O N VII. 227

thy Head, shall be Brass ; and the Earth, which is under thee, shall be Iron [Deut. 28.] These things were written for our Instruction, doubtless ; for, though this Law were given immediately to the *Israelites*, yet we are much mistaken if we think, that we have no Concern in it. All the moral Precepts do equally reach to us ; and the Sanctions whereby they are enforced, will, in a due Proportion, reach us too.---If there be a Providence (as we are sure there is), then this Providence must be *wise* and *just*. But *Justice* is concerned in making a Distinction between the Righteous and the Wicked ; and *Wisdom* in administering Affairs in such a Manner, as to support the Dignity of God's Laws.

If we consider Fact, we shall find many remarkable Instances of Blessings bestowed on the Righteous, and of eminent Misfortunes which have befallen the Wicked. To say nothing of those Accounts which are given us of the early Ages of the World, we may see, through all Times, that *Righteousness hath exalted a Nation, whilst Sin hath been a Reproach to a People* : We have seen the honest Man thrive and prosper, whilst the Riches of the Dishonest have gradually mouldered away ; a secret Curse hath attended

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him,

228 S E R M O N VII.

him, both in his Coming-out and his Going-in.

It is true, indeed, Men are not *always* distinguished, in reference to this World, as their several Virtues or Vices might require. There are good Men, who suffer Affliction; and there are bad Men, who thrive and prosper, and at length go down to the Grave in Peace. This Consideration should create no Uneasiness: The Affairs of Life are involved; and the present Circumstances of Things may not always admit an exact Distribution of worldly Good and Evil.--But *this World passeth away, and the Fashion of it*:—Amends will be made hereafter: The Afflictions of the Righteous shall be doubly rewarded,—and the Prosperity of the Sinner shall heighten his Condemnation.

However, it becomes us not to reckon so much on the Success of some few prosperous Sinners. In the very natural Course of Things, a Life of Virtue and Religion will bid fairer for temporal Advantages, than a contrary Conduct: And however this should be found, —yet still we are under the Influence of a just and mighty Power; — of one, from whom none of our Actions can be hid; and who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity.

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S E R M O N VII. 229

To him therefore let us recommend ourselves in every thing we set our Hands unto; always remembering this pious Instruction of the Holy Psalmist:—*Except the Lord build the House, their Labour is but lost that build it. Except the Lord keep the City, the Watchman waketh but in vain. It is but lost Labour that we haste to rise up early, and so late take Rest, and eat the Bread of Carefulness* [Psal. cxxvii. 1, 2, 3.]

I must proceed, and recollect a Third Observation formerly suggested. This is grounded on what I presume might have been the Occasion of *Cain's* extreme Aversion in reference to his Brother, and which led the Way to that horrid Crime he afterwards committed; I mean, Envy at his Brother's Prosperity, whilst his own Hopes and Expectations were blasted. The Instruction we should learn from hence, is; To guard against the Approaches of this Passion with a watchful and religious Care.

By *Envy*, I understand a Dissatisfaction arising from the Success and Good-fortune of another, whatever that Success be, and whatsoever be the Station of the successful Person. I conceive it is not always shewn towards Superiors only; Men may *envy* their

230 S E R M O N VII.

Equals,---and, in some Cases, their Inferiors. When this Passion shews itself towards Superiors, it is generally founded in Pride and excessive Ambition :---When it is exercised towards Equals, it arises generally from Insolence of Temper, which cannot bear a Rival :--And, lastly, when it is referred to Inferiors, it springs from Inhumanity and Cruelty. But, whatever Principles it is derived from, the Nature of the Vice will be still the same: It is a Dissatisfaction at another's Success and Prosperity.

That the Passion is unreasonable, will be apparent at first Sight: For what Ground can there be why one Man should be uneasy purely at the Good-fortune of another? Are *our* Enjoyments the less, because *another* thrives and prospers? Or do we suffer by his Advancement? I speak not of those Cases in which the Prosperity of a bad Man may prejudice the common Interests of Mankind: This, no doubt, will be grievous to a charitable and good-natured Person: But I speak of that Dissatisfaction which is occasioned merely by the Success of another; and in those Cases in which his Success carries with it no Damage or Inconvenience to Mankind. On such Occasions Reason would teach us to rejoice

S E R M O N VII. 231

rejoice in his Good-fortune ; and especially if he had any Relation to us, either of Acquaintance, or Friendship, or Kindred.

But, besides this, there is implanted in us by Nature a Tendernefs and Concern for Mankind. This shews itself when we view Persons in Distress : We feel, in some Sense, the Calamities of others ; and are uneasy till we relieve them. This is the Temper of Men, who have not corrupted their Nature, and lost the Sentiments of Humanity : But the same Principle which makes us grieve at the Misfortunes of others, would lead us (if we duly followed it) to rejoice in their Prosperity ; to think their Good-luck our own ; and to enjoy, in some Sense, the Advantages possessed by others. *Envy* therefore is a Passion as unnatural as unreasonable ; and the very worst Imitation of the Devil himself, who is unwilling that others should attain that Happiness from which he fell.

Again : It is *impious* with regard to God : As we were all created by his Power, so are we still preserved by his Providence : He created us to make us happy ; and, in ordering the Things of Life, he consults the several Interests of particular Men, as far as they are consistent with the Good of the Whole. We

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232 S E R M O N VII.

have none of us,---no not the Best of us, any strict Right to the Things we enjoy. Every thing flows from his Bounty. Shall we then disquiet ourselves because others partake of these Favours of Heaven?---But what Right have we to prescribe to God?---*Is our Eye evil, because he is good?* This, if any thing, is a Provocation to him to withdraw from us the Blessings as yet permitted us.

Hitherto I have noted how unreasonable, how unnatural, how impious, this Passion is: I will go on, and observe, in the next place, that it must prove exceedingly mischievous, as well to the World in general, as to that Person who indulges this Passion. It is mischievous to Mankind, because it hinders Men from contributing their Share of Assistance towards promoting the general Good: It rather incites them to prevent, and stop, as far as they can, the Good of others: It not only gives a Check to Humanity, but, as it proceeds from, so, it heightens and increases, Cruelty. Nor does the Evil stop here: It makes a Man cruel, not only to others, but to himself; and to impair his own Enjoyments out of mere Vexation at the Enjoyments of others. He who gives way to this Passion, must be ever uneasy: It is impossible

S E R M O N VII. 233

possible that he should be the only happy or successful Person in the World. If therefore he cannot be satisfied in the Success of another, he will never want Occasions of Discontent : He will vex and torment himself, as without Reason, so, without End.

Once more : There is scarce any horrid or shocking Crime but what may proceed from the Excesses of this Passion. He who cannot bear the Success of others, will stick at no Methods to cross or hinder that Success : Injustice, Oppression, Slander, and the like, will and must arise from hence : And, if these are found to miscarry, other Expedients, of a more dreadful Nature, will offer. *Cain*, we see, in the Instance before us, was tempted from hence to murder his own Brother : He could not bear to see that Prosperity he was unable to hinder ; and therefore he was resolved to destroy the Life of that Person he could not ruin. At such a Crime as this, I doubt not, we are shocked all of us :---But we have seen from what Original it sprung ; and therefore are concerned to guard, with the most watchful Care, against that Passion, which, once indulged, we know not whither it may lead us.

To proceed : A Fourth Remark refers to
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234 S E R M O N VII.

the Conduct and Behaviour of *Cain* after the Murder of his Brother. The History tells us, That God condescended so far as to expostulate the Matter with him; and to enquire what was become of *Abel*. The Question was enough to suggest his Crime to him; and therefore should have induced him to humble himself before God, and to intreat Pardon for that Crime he could never repair. But, instead of this, the hardened Sinner goes on to increase his Sins; He replies, *Am I my Brother's Keeper?* Thus endeavouring to conceal the Murder from the Knowledge of that Being, to whom all things past, present, and to come, are naked and open. The Attempt was as vain as impious. *What hast thou done* (saith God)? *The Voice of thy Brother's Blood crieth from the Ground.* The Use we should make of this Circumstance, is, to assure ourselves, that all our Actions are in like manner open to God's Eye; that every heinous Sin will, by some means or other, be certainly brought to Light; and the Evil which a Man hath committed, shall fall upon his own Head.

There cannot be a more effectual Guard against the Commission of Sin, than to consider, that where-ever we are, and whatever

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S E R M O N VII. 235

we do, we are under the immediate Inspection of God himself: He is present everywhere, and as intimately conscious to our very Thoughts as we ourselves. We may impose on Men by outward Shews and fair Pretences; we may conceal from them those Actions we are afraid or ashamed to own; and sometimes carry off the Reputation of Virtue, whilst we are guilty of many secret Sins. But what avails all this, if, at the same time, the Almighty Judge of Heaven and Earth beholds us? If the Supreme Director of our Fortunes be the Witness of our Crimes;--and He sees us, who shall hereafter reward or punish us? There is a Sort of Modesty implanted in human Nature, which the worst and most profligate Persons are not always capable of mastering. Hence, few dare to commit their abominable Actions in the View and Presence of a good Man: They entertain some sort of Reverence for his Character, and are ashamed that those Sins should be seen by a virtuous Man, which they cannot approve themselves.---And yet all Men have a Mixture of Infirmary. The most righteous Person sinneth, and cometh far short of the Glory of God. Still, whilst the Good Man endeavours to discharge his Duty in the

236 S E R M O N VII.

best Manner he is able, he strikes an Awe into the Bad : Modesty bids him retire ; and, if he will sin on, to commit his Sins in secret. It was upon this account that a wise Philosopher once prescribed this Rule to his Followers : *Think yourselves always in the Presence of a wise and virtuous Person.* This will make you keep a Guard over yourselves, and act nothing unbecoming your own Dignity.

But if the Presence of a *Man*, weak and frail as ourselves, may be of so much Avail in this Case, how should we be influenced by the Consideration of the Divine Presence ? Were there nothing else to be regarded, yet this should have some Weight with us : That by acting ill, we must make ourselves vile in the Sight of our Creator ; that, by this means, we must lose the Approbation of the Supreme Judge of Worth and Merit ; and, as often as we reflect, must condemn and abhor ourselves.---Yet this is not all : God, who now sees our Actions, shall hereafter reward or punish them ;---either reward us beyond our Deserts, or punish us beyond our Conceptions. Whenever therefore we are venturing on any momentous Action, let us consider with ourselves, that we are about to act in the Presence

S E R M O N VII. 237

fence of God. This surely will make us cautious and fearful of offending him; desirous and solicitous of pleasing him.

But if we persist in a thoughtless and inconsiderate Course of Action;---careful of nothing but how to conceal ourselves from the Sight of Men,---let us think, that even this Care is vain. The God, with whom we have to do, as he sees our Actions, can reveal them a Thousand Ways: He can make the Sinner betray himself; and turn the very Methods used to conceal him, into Methods of Discovery. By once touching his Conscience, he can make him the Publisher of his own Crimes: He can force him to demand that Justice, which at the same time he dreads.

No Security therefore can be had but in a Course of Innocence. He who is not conscious of any grievous Crimes, may lift up his Head with Courage: Whilst his Conscience acquits, his God will approve him; and give him Confidence in all Events, whether of Life or Death.

There is One thing more, which I think myself concerned to speak to: It respects the extreme Punishment inflicted on *Cain*, and the Agonies of his Guilt. Under the Sense of these, he cried out, *That his Sin was*
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238 S E R M O N VII.

greater than he could bear. From hence then let us take Warning, and not provoke the Divine Vengeance, which we can neither conceive nor bear.

No one, who hath not felt them, can tell what those Torments are, which arise from the Accusations and Censures of a guilty Mind. The Sinner, whilst he is pursuing his Sins, --- surrounded by his intemperate Companions, and in the full Enjoyment of Health and Pleasure, is unapt to reflect: He may go on for some time in a senseless Course of Vanity; forgetful of what is past, and thoughtless of what is to come. But such a Course cannot be always carried on: He will have some sober and thoughtful Hours: He will be apt to reflect on what he hath done; the Mischief he hath occasioned to others, and the Disgrace he hath brought upon himself; the reasonable Precepts he hath neglected, and the just and righteous God he hath offended. Full of these Thoughts,--- and roused by these uneasy Reflections, whether shall he flee for Ease? His offended God, though he be infinitely merciful, appears to him infinitely terrible; and so much the more so, because he cannot be avoided. *If we ascend up into Heaven, he is there; if we*
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S E R M O N VII. 239

make our Bed in [the Grave], behold he is there. If we take the Wings of the Morning, and remain in the uttermost Parts of the Earth; Even there too shall his Hand lead us, and his Right-hand shall hold us. We may go out indeed (as Cain did) from the Presence of the Lord; be deprived of the Comforts of his Influence, and the Sense of his Favour: But still, we shall in another Sense feel his Presence: We shall know he is with us, by the Torments we endure; and acknowledge the Justice of that Hand from which we suffer. Conscience itself (though there were nothing more in the Case) is one of the most deadly Enemies we can provoke: For it will still haunt and disquiet us, and follow us whithersoever we go.

The Author of The Book of Wisdom [ch. xvii.] hath given us a beautiful Description of the Terrors of a guilty Mind. *Whilst Sinners, saith he, supposed to lie hid in their secret Sins,---they were horribly astonished, and troubled with strange Apparitions.---For neither might the Corner, which held them, keep them from Fear: But Noises, as of Waters falling down, sounded about them; and sad Visions appeared unto them, with heavy Countenances.---There appeared unto them a Fire kindled*

240 S E R M O N VII.

kindled of itself, very dreadful: For, being much terrified, they thought the Things which they saw, to be worse than the Sight they saw not. An heavy Night was spread over them,---an Image of that Darknefs which should afterward receive them: But yet were they to themselves more grievous than the Darknefs. Thus far even Conscience itself can go:---But how much more dreadful must be the Case of those Persons in whom the Arrows of the Lord shall stick, — and whose Hand presseth them sore. Outward Afflictions may be added to these inward Terrors; or, even without these, a secret Vengeance may be poured on the Sinner's Mind, which no one perceives besides himself. Or if a Man should escape this, and pass many prosperous and thoughtless Years; — yet a Fit of Sicknefs, and a Death-bed, may awaken him. When he is entering into another World, he *may*, and probably *will*, have a more distinct View of these things: He will be astonished at the dreadful Fate he finds unavoidable,---and resign his Soul with Horror. Who can bear up under the Sense of this Wrath of God, or stand before his Face when he is angry?

To conclude my Reflections on the History before us: The Story of *Cain* is recorded to caution

S E R M O N VII. 241

caution us against the Sins he committed, by representing to us, in some measure, the Punishments he endured. If we read it with this View, and meditate carefully upon it, we shall be led to correct the Errors of our own Lives, by observing the Errors and Misfortunes of *his*: But if we neglect to make this Use of the Sacred History; if we read it only to gratify our Curiosity, and to know what passed Six thousand Years ago;---then indeed it will serve us to no good Purpose. But yet God's Glory will, some way or other, be carried on, whether we will or no. This History, which was intended for our Service, will heighten our Condemnation; and we shall glorify that God by our Sufferings, whom we would not honour in our Lives.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, &c.
Amen.

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 what has happened, it is no good purpose.
 Indeed, it is no use to us, if we do not
 apply it to our glory, if it is not a way of
 leading us, whether we will or no. This
 history, which was intended for all, is
 to be a lesson of our Condemnation, and
 we shall glory that God by our sinners
 whom we would not honour in our hearts.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, God

the Holy Spirit, Amen.
 The Lord be with us, and with all his people.
 Amen.
 Now to God the Father, God the Son, God
 the Holy Spirit, Amen.

S E R M O N V I I I .

The Example of A B R A H A M ' s Faith
proposed to Christians,

H E B. xi. 17, 18, 19.

By Faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that had received the Promises, offered up his only-begotten Son :

Of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy Seed be called :

Accounting, that God was able to raise him up, even from the Dead ; from whence also he received him in a Figure.

TH E R E are several Senses in which the Word *Faith* is used in Holy Scripture : But those, which it is most to my present Purpose to observe, are set forth to us in the first Verse of this Chap-

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244 S E R M O N VIII.

ter ; in which we are informed, that *Faith is the Substance of Things hoped for ; the Evidence of Things not seen.*

Yet Difficulties may be thought to arise from this very Description given us by the Apostle. The Terms here used have somewhat of Obscurity, as they stand in our Translation ; and therefore may need a Comment.

To this purpose let it be noted, that the Term, here rendered *Substance*, *Faith is the Substance of Things hoped for*, is often used, in other Places, to signify *Trust* or *Confidence* ; and, agreeably, it is rendered by this very Word in the Margin of our own Bible. In this View the Passage before us is clear and easy ; for, though it be difficult to apprehend, how *Faith* can be *the Substance of Things hoped for*, in the strict Sense of the Word ; that is, How it can be the very Things themselves we hope for ;---yet we may easily form a Notion of its being a *Confidence in*, or a *firm Reliance upon*, the Things hoped for.

It is farther added, That *Faith* likewise is *the Evidence of Things not seen* ; by which Words, I conceive, we may understand, *an undoubting Assent to those Things, which are of themselves inevident.* It is frequent with the
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S E R M O N VIII. 245

best Writers to use indifferently the Cause for the Effect, or the Effect for the Cause. Assent therefore being the certain Consequence of Proof or Evidence sufficiently perceived, the Expression *Evidence* seems here to be used for Assent; and so this Branch likewise of our Apostle's Description will be clear and easy.

That there is a Difference between the Two Branches of this Description of Faith; and that *the Substance of Things hoped for*, and *the Evidence of Things not seen*, are not barely different Expressions of the same Meaning and Signification, will appear from hence: A Confidence in Things hoped for, must always respect what is *future*; and so *St. Paul* says, in his Epistle to the *Romans*, [ch. viii. ver. 24.] *What a Man seeth*, [or hath in present Possession] *why doth he yet hope for?* But an Assent to Things of themselves inevent, may respect what is either *past* or *present*: And, agreeably, there is One Instance of Faith mentioned in this Chapter, which cannot be referred to Trust or Confidence. Thus, [ver. 3.] *Through Faith we understand, that the Worlds were framed by the Word of God; so that Things which are seen, were not made of Things which did appear.* This Passage

246 S E R M O N VIII.

most evidently refers to Belief or Assent,—and not to Trust or Confidence.

It must indeed be confessed, that in the remaining Instances recorded in this Chapter, our Apostle treats of *Faith*, as it signifies a firm Reliance on the Divine Goodness and Promises; this being most suitable to his Design in this Place. But yet, as there is clearly a twofold Notion of Faith suggested by him in his own Description of it, I shall, in the following Discourse, consider it in both Views; and, as Faith (in which Sense soever we take it) is built on one common Principle; *viz.* The Goodness and Veracity of God, I shall apply the Reasons for Faith in one Sense, to the Instances which occur in the other Sense of it; and shew, that we have the same Concern to believe what God declares, as to expect what he promises.

My Text supplies me with a remarkable Instance of *Faith* in the Person of *Abraham*; who, being tried in an extraordinary Manner, and having approved himself upon this strict Trial, is dignified with the Title of being *Father of the Faithful*.

It shall be my Business, in the following Discourse, to set this Example in a proper Light; to point out the Instances in which
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he was tried, and the Reasons and Grounds on which he built his Confidence, notwithstanding the Difficulties which pressed him.

After which, I shall apply what shall be said concerning the *Faith of Abraham* to the Case of Christians under the Gospel Dispensation; and shew, that we have the same Reasons to believe the Doctrines delivered to us in the New Testament (however involved in Difficulties), as he had to depend on the Divine Promises.

And, First then, I am to set the Example of *Abraham* in a proper Light; to point out the Instances in which he was tried,---with the Reasons and Grounds on which he built his Confidence, notwithstanding the Difficulties which pressed him.

This eminent Person was almost singular in his Worship of the true God: For, though he was born in so early an Age after the Flood, yet Mankind were already grown so corrupt, that few Families, at the most, were duly mindful of that wonderful Destruction. Idolatry, with every other Kind of Abomination, soon prevailed over the Earth;---and it seemed already to need the Punishment of another Flood. *Abraham*, however, retained a just Sense of Divine Providence. It will

248 S E R M O N VIII.

appear by his Behaviour, which I shall hereafter mention, that the Seeds of Religion, which had been early implanted in him, took deep Root in his Mind,--and recommended him to the particular Favour of the Almighty.

This is evident from that Intercourse God was pleased to maintain with him through the several Parts of his Life. The First Instance of which we meet with [*Gen. xii. 1.*] *Now the Lord said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy Country, and from thy Kindred, and from thy Father's House, unto a Land that I will shew thee.* Here was at once a Command and a Promise expressly delivered by God himself. The Command had something in it of Severity; *Get thee out of thy Country, and from thy Kindred, and from thy Father's House.* And, what might at that Time seem still more severe, he was not particularly acquainted whither he should go. Thus our Apostle to the Hebrews tells us, *By Faith Abraham, when he was called to go out unto a Place which he should after receive for an Inheritance, obeyed: And he went out, not knowing whither he went.* We see here a Trial of his Obedience, grounded on his Faith in the Promises of God: He knew God was able to make good his Engagements of bestowing on him

S E R M O N VIII. 249

him a better Country ; and therefore he readily complied, though he knew not where that Country lay.

But the most remarkable Instance of his Faith is distinctly mentioned in the Words of my Text. *By Faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac ; and he that had received the Promises, offered up his only-begotten Son : Of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy Seed be called.*

It appears, by the Account which *Moses* hath given us in the Book of *Genesis*, that as the Lord had promised *Abraham*, *That in his Seed all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed ;* so, in course of Time, he was more particular and express in this Promise ; having declared, That the Accomplishment of this Prediction should be made in *Isaac ;* a Son miraculously born, when both his Parents were past the Hopes of Children.

This Son, the Joy and Comfort of his old Age, he was required to offer up in Sacrifice to the Lord ;---and so to part not only with the dearest and most valuable Thing in Life, but to destroy that very Person in whom the Divine Promises, so often repeated, were hereafter to be fulfilled. He obeyed, however,

250 S E R M O N VIII.

ever, *trusting in the Lord*; and, *even against Hope*, believed in Hope.

It will be proper to prosecute this Matter more distinctly; to observe the several Particulars which made *Abraham's* Faith and Obedience, in this Instance, the more remarkable; together with the Grounds and Reasons on which he proceeded in this difficult and trying Affair.

He was required then to sacrifice his own Son. The Words in *Genesis* are exprefs; *Take now thy Son, thine only Son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee unto the Land of Moriah; and offer him there for a Burnt-offering upon one of the Mountains, which I shall tell thee of.* [*Gen. xxii. 2.*]

The Command, we see, proceeded immediately from God himself: But how, and in what Manner, it was conveyed to him, is no-where said. This only can be affirmed, That God may (if he pleases) communicate his Will to his Creatures; and, whenever he vouchsafes to do so, he will, no doubt, give sufficient Evidence of the Revelation; But, as in judging concerning a Revelation made to another, Men are allowed to use their Reason, so are they in judging concerning

S E R M O N VIII. 251

concerning that Revelation which, they suppose, is made to themselves; and so Difficulties may arise, as well in the one Case, as in the other.

Thus, as to the Command here revealed to *Abraham* about sacrificing his only Son; it might, at first, seem very unlikely, that God, who is a Lover of Mankind, should take Pleasure in the very Death of his Worshipers. It doth not appear, that any thing of this kind was ever required by him before; and *Abraham* might perhaps be tempted to think, that Religion was more a Friend to Humanity, than to admit of so harsh a Command.

But, if Difficulties might be supposed to arise from the bare Sentiments of common Humanity, how much greater must those be, which flowed from fatherly Tenderness and Affection? To destroy the Life of another Man unprovoked, is no easy Matter to a compassionate Mind: But to destroy a Son, — and that with his own Hands too, must carry with it somewhat more of Horror.

The more unlikely might it seem to *Abraham*, that such a Command should proceed from God; — because this *Isaac*, now required

252 S E R M O N VIII.

quired to be offered up in Sacrifice, was promised, and bestowed on *Abraham* as the greatest Blessing of his old Age. And doth God bestow Favours only to take them away? And delight to render our Lives more miserable, by withdrawing those Blessings we are just permitted to taste? Far happier might the good Man at first think it, never to have had a Son at all, than to become the Witness, nay, the Instrument, of his Death, when he was just grown up to be the Comfort and Support of his old Age.

The greatest Difficulty however is yet behind; and that is, How to reconcile this severe Command of sacrificing *Isaac*, with God's former Promises, that *in Isaac all the Nations of the Earth should be blessed*. Real Contradictions (whatever may be said to the contrary) cannot possibly be the Object of Belief. And therefore it may be supposed some Struggles did arise in the Mind of this good Man, between the Belief of former Revelations and of the *present*. If *Isaac* was that *Seed, in whom all the Nations of the Earth were to be blessed*, — then his Life seemed necessary to be spared, that he might in time become the Instrument of such a

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S E R M O N VIII. 253

Blessing ;—or, if it were necessary that he should at present be offered up in Sacrifice, ---then these former Promises seemed vain : And, if no Credit was to be given to these former Promises, it might perhaps be pretty difficult to shew what greater Authority belonged to this Command.

This was certainly a very perplexed Case : But Reason came in to the good Man's Succour ; and impartial Reflection served to solve the Difficulties of first Appearances. We shall see, by more nearly viewing the Case, that there was yet sufficient Ground for *Abraham's* Belief and Obedience ; and that the Excellency of his Faith did not consist (as Unbelievers will have it) in opposing common Sense and Reason,—but in duly attending to it in the most nice and critical Conjunction.

I have observed already, that whenever God thinks fit to reveal himself to Mankind, he doubtless gives sufficient Evidence of the Revelation : And therefore we can make no Question but *Abraham* had sufficient Proof (whatever that Proof was), that the several Revelations, respecting both God's former Promises, and the present severe Command, did really proceed from God.

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254 S E R M O N VIII.

Such a Sufficiency of Proof cannot be doubted. Let us now proceed to consider, how he might, and probably did, satisfy himself as to the Difficulties I have before mentioned.

And, First, as to human Sacrifices : Whatever the general Proceedings of Providence may be, yet we cannot from hence determine what God must do on every emergent Occasion. All Men are God's Creatures ; and therefore he may (as Lord of the Creation) demand back that Life he at first bestowed. This immediately arises from hence, that, as Men had originally no Right to Life, so neither have they to the Continuance of this Blessing ; and, as God may (without being accountable to his Creatures) bestow it for what Length of Time he pleases,—so may he likewise resume this Gift at what Season he shall judge most proper. This sovereign Dominion and Power of God is exercised in the ordinary Course of Providence ; and every Day doth, in some sort, do the Work, which seems so extraordinary in the Objection before us. Diseases, and what we call Accidents (both of them the Instruments of the Divine Will), remove Men out of Life ; and of this they make no Complaint,

Complaint, because it happens every Day: But, if a Life be destroyed by the Solemnity of Sacrificing, it seems hard and unaccountable:—Why?—Not because it interferes with any Kind of Right on the Part of Man, any more than in the former Case, — but only because it is unusual and extraordinary. This indeed we grant. The Command in the Text was the first of its Kind which ever really came from God: But yet it was a Command which he had a Right to give; and his Wisdom should determine when it was fit and proper to be given. The Matter will be clear, when we consider, that the whole is resolveable into God's Authority and Wisdom;—his Authority, which supercedes every human Claim; and his Wisdom, which unerringly directs the Exercise of his Authority.

As to the Person who was required to be the Instrument in executing this Command, we should observe, That, if God hath a Right and Dominion over Mens Lives, he may then take them away, not only at what Time he pleases, but likewise by what Means he sees proper: And, if this be allowed, it will follow, that he may employ whom he pleases as the Executioner of his Will. And how-
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256 S E R M O N VIII.

ever harsh and severe the Command might seem, That a tender and affectionate Parent should offer up his only-begotten Son, — yet *Abraham* had better Notions of his Obligations to God, than to oppose human Will to the Divine.

He had received this very Son by the Divine Favour; and, if he set any Value on this Blessing, he ought more highly to prize the Divine Favour, from which this Blessing flowed. He knew God's Bounty was inexhaustible; and, if he should withdraw what he had formerly bestowed, — and that under Circumstances most severe, — yet he might be confident of a future Amends: God, who had been the Director of his Youth, he might be sure would not desert him in his old Age.

Let us now see how the Consistency between God's former Promises and his present Command may be made out; — and how the good Man argued and reasoned with himself in a Matter, which, at first, appeared so difficult and perplexing.

To a Person who should not reflect on the unlimited Power of God, but attend only to common Appearances, the Difficulty must be insuperable; the Death of *Isaac* putting an
End

S E R M O N VIII. 257

End to all human Prospect of Blessings from him. But the Author of Life may restore that Life which is destroyed. He, who at first called all things out of nothing, may surely repair a dissolved Body, and unite it to its proper Soul. If this be possible, then the Sacrifice of *Isaac* could not defeat the Divine Promises: For, though he should die, yet might he still be raised to Life again, and accomplish what was prophesied concerning him.

And this was the very Argument by which *Abraham* supported his Faith on this Occasion. The Text tells us, he thus reasoned with himself; That *God was able to raise him up even from the Dead; from whence also he received him in a Figure.*

The Possibility of this Supposition, grounded on the unlimited Power of God, he farther confirmed by reflecting on the extraordinary Manner of *Isaac's* Birth. He was born beyond all human Expectation, when both his Parents were old; and he reasoned very justly, That, if he received him at first from the extraordinary Bounty of God (who was pleased to act out of the common Order of Nature),—he might as well receive him a Second time in as extraordinary a Manner.

258 S E R M O N VIII.

He doubted not therefore, but steadfastly believed, that what God had promised, he was able and willing to perform.

Before I proceed farther, it may be proper to draw a Conclusion or two from this Conduct of *Abraham*, of great Moment and Importance.

We are to note then, That, in Matters of Religion, we should not give way to the first Appearances of Difficulty,---nor attend too much to the Solicitations of Passion: Had *Abraham* done so, we should have wanted this excellent Pattern of Faith and Obedience. But he considered Matters thoroughly; and so confirmed his Faith by the Assistances of Reason.

How different is the Behaviour of our modern Objectors against Religion! They are carried away with the first Shew of Difficulty; and, being impatient of Examination, reject the Truth of every Article they cannot immediately master. This is most remarkable with regard to those Points which cross upon some present Passion or Desire; which, having been long accustomed to gratify, they know not well how to conquer. But *Truth* is still *Truth*, however disagreeable it may possibly appear; and in the Search after it, Men
should

S E R M O N VIII. 259

should rather consult their own cool and impartial Reason, than their vain and extravagant Humours.

We may observe, in the next Place, That where Difficulties are started in Matters of Faith, it is not necessary that we should give a distinct and precise Solution to these Difficulties. It is sufficient, if we can shew, that the Point objected against is not *absolutely impossible*; and this is done by making any one Supposition on which it may possibly be true. Such was the Case of *Abraham*, who satisfied himself in the Consistency between God's Promises and his Command, by only arguing, That God *might* raise up *Isaac* from the Dead, though he had not as yet experienced any Instance of that nature.

If this Reflection were duly attended to, all those Objections against the Truths of Religion (which are sometimes thought so great) would vanish immediately: For the only Question *then* would be, Is the Thing objected against absolutely impossible? If not,—then, I conceive, common Modesty must allow, that the Divine Testimony given to it, is a much surer Proof of Truth, than any Difficulties alleged (which are often too much heightened by human Prejudices) can

260 S E R M O N VIII.

be an Argument of Falshood. And this leads me to my

Second Head proposed; *viz.* To apply what hath been said, concerning the Faith of *Abraham*, to the Case of Christians under the Gospel Dispensation.

We also have Promises made us: And Difficulties may be started as well with respect to *these*, as in relation to the Promises made to *Abraham*. His Example therefore may be pertinently urged to us; and we may satisfy ourselves in the very same Way, which proved so useful to this great Father of the Faithful.

Thus, for Instance: We are assured, that there shall be a Distinction made between the Righteous and the Sinner;---that the Favour of God ever attends the Workers of Righteousness;---and that the *Wickedness of the Wicked shall be upon him*: Yet, notwithstanding this, we often see the *Ungodly in great Power, and flourishing like a green Bay-tree*; whilst *the Righteous are all the Day long punished, and chastened every Morning*.

Here are Effects, at first Sight, as disagreeing with these comfortable Assurances, as the Command of God to *Abraham* about Sacrificing his Son, and his Promises of extraordinary

S E R M O N VIII. 261

traordinary Blessings from him, could ever appear to be.

Yet, in this Case, we are not left to Doubt or Despair ; but may satisfy ourselves, as to the Truth of God's Promises, and the Equity of his Proceedings : For, first of all, we cannot, with any Certainty, pronounce concerning the real Happiness or Unhappiness of Mens Condition ; so that, for any thing we know, a secret Curse may attend the Prosperity of the one, and a secret Blessing the Adversity of the other. And, however this be, yet present Inequalities may be set at rights hereafter : *The Good Man's Righteousness may at length be made clear as the Light, and his just Dealing as the Noon-day;---whilst the Ungodly perish at the Presence of God, and even as the Smoke consume away.* If this shall prove the Case (as, from barely considering the Nature of Things, it may be) ; then all Difficulties, concerning the Conduct of Providence in the present Case, are immediately solved.

Again : We are taught, that at the last Day every Man shall appear in his own proper Body, to receive for the Things done in that Body, whether they be good or evil. But, some Man may say, *How are the Dead*

262 S E R M O N VIII.

raised up? How is it possible, that the several Parts of a dissolved Body, after having passed through so great a Variety of Changes, should ever be brought together again?—It is possible, because all these Parts still continuing to exist, they *may*, in the Nature of Things, be moved or brought to any one Place, and be ranged in any particular Order; so that, if there be but Knowledge and Power enough for such a Purpose, we cannot dispute the Possibility of the Thing: And if the Thing be possible, then the Promise of God (who is all-knowing and all-powerful) will render it certain.

Let us pass on from considering the Promises of God made to Christians, and take a View of some other mysterious Doctrines delivered in the New Testament.

The Incarnation of the Son of God, is a Doctrine above our Comprehension; — but not, on that account, above our Faith. Difficulties may here be started; yet, if these Difficulties are not such as render this Point absolutely impossible, our Faith is secure notwithstanding.

By the Incarnation of Christ, we mean, such an Union of his Divine Nature to the Human, as made both, so united, to become
One

S E R M O N VIII. 263

One Person. To say distinctly what that Union was, and in what it consisted, we dare not attempt; for *secret Things belong to God*. Yet it doth not follow, that, because we cannot form a distinct and complete Notion concerning this Point, it is therefore impossible: But, if such an Union *may* be, then we have sufficient Assurance, from other Considerations, that it actually hath been; and the Word of God ought to over-balance all the vain Scruples of Man.

To advance a Step farther: We are taught in Holy Scripture, that, although there is but *One* God, yet, in the Unity of this Godhead, there are *Three* Persons; *viz.* The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost. We call them Persons, because distinct personal Attributes and Actions are ascribed to them in Holy Scripture: But, as for any thing more determinate than this, we dare not attempt it on so arduous a Point. Yet, *How*, may some object, can *Three* Persons be in *One* Divine Nature? Are not *Three* Persons, in the human Nature, *Three* Men? *Three* Persons therefore, in the Divine Nature, must be *Three* Gods; and, if they are *Three* Gods, what then must become of the Unity of the Divine Nature?

264 S E R M O N VIII.

Did we mean the same by Person when applied to God, as we do when applied to Men, the Objection would be unanswerable: But the Case is otherwise. We use the Term Person (as was observed before) because the Holy Scriptures ascribe distinct personal Attributes and Actions to the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Ghost*; each of whom are yet, in other Places, set forth as strictly and properly God. By *Person*, therefore, we mean, the unknown Ground or Principle of these personal Attributes and Actions: And we use the Word, *not* in a strict and proper Sense, but, only as it sets forth a remote and distant Resemblance of human Personality.

Nor can the Use of Terms in such a large Sense, when speaking of the Divine Nature, be denied by those, who, on other Occasions, allow us the Use of such Expressions as these; *viz.* The Divine *Love*, the Divine *Anger*, and the like. No Man of common Capacity ever understands Expressions of this sort in a strict Sense: And, if we may be allowed such a Latitude of Expression in our ordinary Discourses concerning the Divine Nature, it will be hard to shew a Reason, why we should not be permitted the same Liberty in expressing the Doctrine I have now been speaking of.

I hope

S E R M O N VIII. 265

I hope then we are secure thus far, that the usual, and indeed principal, Difficulty alleged, is grounded on a Mistake, as to the Sense of the Word *Person*, when applied to God. If this be once gotten over, there will *not* appear to be any Impossibility in this Doctrine; and, if there be no Impossibility in its being true, then we are fully assured that it actually is so.

I shall close my Discourse with only observing this; That, whilst we are endeavouring to support our Faith, we should not be forgetful of good Works. These are both of them necessary; and the former directly leads us to the latter.

We read, that *Abraham's Faith was accounted unto him for Righteousness*: But then, *St. James* tells us, that *Faith wrought with his Works*; — and *by Works was his Faith made perfect*. Let us not pretend to rest in a naked Contemplation of the great Truths of the Gospel: They were revealed for nobler Purposes, and intended to enforce the Duty of Obedience. It is to no Purpose that we maintain the Orthodoxy of our Faith, as to the deep Points of our Religion, if we still promote Heresy in our Practice, and by our Actions disgrace our Belief. These are both
jointly

266 S E R M O N VIII.

jointly necessary to Salvation ; and what God hath joined together, let not Man put asunder. *Wilt thou know, saith St. James, that Faith without Works is dead?—As the Body without the Spirit is dead, so Faith without Works is dead also.*

S E R-

S E R M O N IX.

On the Nature and Employment of
Good Angels.

IN TWO PARTS.

P A R T I.

H E B. i. 14.

*Are they not all ministering Spirits, sent out
to minister for them who shall be Heirs of
Salvation?*

THE Author of this Epistle endeavours to confirm the *Jewish* Converts in the Religion they had embraced, by this great Consideration amongst others;---That it was immediately delivered by *the Son of God, the Heir of all things, and Creator of the World*; and therefore must demand a stricter Attention and Regard than
any

268 S E R M O N IX.

any other Religion,—than even the Law of *Moses* itself, could claim. *Jesus Christ*, the Founder of the Gospel, is here affirmed to be, *the Brightness of God's Glory, and the express Image of his Person; and to uphold all things by the Word of his Power.* Characters these of the highest Import, and apt to strike our Minds with a commanding Force.

From hence he proceeds farther to shew the Excellence and Dignity of this Divine Law-giver, from the Pre-eminence which he enjoys above the Angels themselves; Beings of whose Excellencies and Powers they had entertained very high Notions. Thus then he proceeds: [ver. 4.] *Being made so much better than the Angels, as he hath by Inheritance obtained a more excellent Name than they. For unto which of the Angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this Day have I begotten thee? And again; I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son:—And again; When he bringeth in the First-begotten into the World, he saith, And let all the Angels of God worship him.*

The same Superiority of our Blessed Lord is pointed out to us in the 13th and 14th Verses. *Unto which of the Angels said he at any time, Sit thou on my Right-hand until I make*

S E R M O N IX. 269

make thine Enemies thy Footstool? Are they not all ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for them which shall be Heirs of Salvation.

Noble and excellent as these Beings are, they are yet but the Attendants on the Divine Throne, and the Ministers that execute God's Pleasure: They sit not at his Right-hand,---are not invested with Supreme Power and Authority; but are, in other Places of Scripture, represented as covering their Faces before him. But our Blessed Lord, *the Brightness of the Father's Glory, and the Sharer of his Power*, receives the Homage and Adoration of these excellent Beings: They are his Subjects and Ministers; they think themselves honoured by the Commands he gives them, and happy in the Obedience which they pay him.

But it is not my Design any farther to consider the Text, as having any Relation to what goes before: I shall treat of it at present as a separate independent Sentence; and as representing to us *the Nature and Employment of Good Angels*. That there are such Beings, is supposed in the Text; and therefore I shall, in the

First Place, shew the Grounds and Reasons

270 S E R M O N IX.

on which our Belief, concerning the Existence of Angels, is built.

Secondly, I shall treat concerning the Nature of them, as they are set forth in the Words before us. They are said to be *Spirits*.

Thirdly, I shall speak somewhat concerning their Employment. They are *ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for them which shall be Heirs of Salvation*. After which, I shall, in the

Last Place, apply the Doctrine to be advanced under these Heads, to its proper Uses and Purposes.

I am to begin with representing the Grounds and Reasons on which our Belief of the Existence of Angels is built.

That there is a Rank of Beings superior to ourselves in Excellency and Perfection,---the more immediate Attendants on the Supreme Being, and the Ministers of his Will,---is not a late or novel Opinion ;---but what was entertained both by *Jews* and *Gentiles* in the earliest Ages. It was so general a Notion amongst the *Jews*, and had so clear a Foundation in the Sacred Writings, that it is remarked as a singular Opinion of a certain Sect, That they held *neither Angel nor Spirit*.

The

S E R M O N IX. 271

The *Sadducees* were the only Infidels, as to this Point, amongst all those who professed any Regard for the Books of *Moses*.

As to the *Gentiles*, they are well known to have believed what they sometimes called Inferior Gods, or *Genii* ; or the Guardians of particular Nations or Persons. These they held to be, *not* independent on the Supreme Being, but, the Ministers and Executioners of his Will ; of a Nature more excellent than ours ; of a Condition more happy ; and of a Station more honourable. This is sufficient for our present Purpose : Nor is it at all to be wondered, if their particular Accounts should be confused or defective. The Belief they had must be founded either on Tradition or Conjecture. Each of these will be liable to Corruption ; especially where there is no greater Light to inform them, and no surer Guide to lead them.

Something, however, may be concluded from the Principles of human Reason, if we are willing to attend to it ; and, though it should not amount to a strict and undeniable Proof of the Existence of Angels, will yet have great Weight with a thinking and sober Man.

It betrays an extreme Narrowness of Mind
to

272 S E R M O N IX.

to suppose, that this Earth, on which we live, is the only Place that is filled with conscious and intelligent Beings :—That those vast Spaces which are spread every way around us, and filled with numberless Bodies, should yet be entirely void of any Inhabitants, capable of adoring God, and understanding the Beauty of his Works. What can we suppose could be the End and Design of creating Man, and placing him in this World? It could only be to make him happy, and to impart to him, in proportion to his Capacities, the Blessings and Advantages of Life. The same Principle of Goodness [which we may suppose induced the Supreme Being to create Man] is infinitely fruitful; and, we may piously presume, must have displayed itself in the Production of numberless other conscious and intelligent Beings.

This Consideration indeed doth not fully come up to the Point we are upon: For it concludes nothing more than *this*; That there probably are other intelligent Beings beside Man; the Inhabitants of other Worlds; the Spectators of the Divine Wisdom, and the favourite Objects of his Goodness. We must take therefore another Step farther; and endeavour to shew, That it is equally probable,
from

S E R M O N IX. 273

from the Principles of common Reason, that there are Beings of a superior Nature ; of greater Knowledge, and more extensive Abilities.

The Divine Being is infinitely wise ; and therefore, we may presume, is uniform and regular in all his Actions. A Difference and Disagreement in Mens Proceedings arises from their narrow View of Things : They appear in various Lights at different Seasons ; and Second Thoughts are often found to correct the former. But all this we must remove from God ; who, as he sees all things at once, so he can never reform his Schemes.

From considering therefore what God hath been pleased to do in those Cases with which we *are* acquainted, we may, upon good Grounds, conclude, what he hath in like manner done in other Cases, with which we are *not* acquainted. This Parity of Reason is of allowed Use on several Occasions. Now it is visible, that God hath created a vast Variety of Beings in the several Degrees of Perfection, and of which Man appears to be the most excellent : But is it at all probable, that there is none superior to Man ? Is the Divine Power exhausted in this Being ? Or, could Goodness bestow no higher De-

274 S E R M O N IX.

grees of Excellence? Who can set Bounds to those Perfections which are in their Nature infinite? If therefore there are so many different Beings, rising one above another in beautiful Order, from the lowest Degree till we come at Man, the highest in the visible World,—it can scarce be doubted but the same Order is still continued; and that there are numberless other Beings, more excellent than Man, rising still one above another, and more capable of illustrating the Wisdom, and Power, and Goodness, of the Deity.

This suggests another Consideration of no ordinary Moment. Man is the only Being in the visible Creation capable of adoring and praising God, and understanding the Beauty of his Works. But how short doth he come of the vast Extent of Knowledge? And how little is there in the beautiful Frame of Nature open to his View? *St. Paul* tells us, *That now we see through a Glass darkly*; numberless Things entirely escape our Notice; and others appear covered with Confusion. The Sight of our Mind, as of our Body, is imperfect; and, though improved by various Assistances, it reaches but a little Way; and all beyond it, is to us as though it had never been. But now, if it be supposed (as
supposed

S E R M O N IX. 275

supposed indeed it must), that God endued Man with a Power of Understanding, in order to discern the Wisdom and Goodness of his Works, and to enjoy himself with the Reflections which naturally arise from such a Knowledge ;—then must we suppose an higher Order of Beings, of greater Capacities, and more extensive Views :—And that for this plain Reason ; Because there is an infinite Variety of Objects which exceed the Reach of the most improved human Understanding.

In short, where-ever God hath created any Faculty or Power, we always suppose there is some suitable Object created with it. The Power would otherwise be given in vain. By the same kind of Reasoning, we may infer, where an Object is created, there must be some suitable Powers which it was intended to gratify : And, since the Objects of Knowledge do abundantly exceed human Understanding, we cannot but conclude, that there is existing an higher Order of Beings, more capable of searching out the Works of God, and of discerning the Wisdom of Nature.

All that remains, in the Pursuit of this Argument, is to shew, That these superior Beings are the more immediate Attendants on God, and the Ministers that execute his Pleasure. I shall draw no Arguments to this Pur-

276 S E R M O N IX.

pose from the Majesty and State which usually accompanies regal Power amongst Men ; it being not at all reasonable to suppose, that the infinitely perfect Being takes his Measures of Conduct from the Behaviour of poor and imperfect Mortals.

If what hath been said be admitted, there must be existing an Order of Beings superior to ourselves in Knowledge and Power ; and we may reasonably suppose farther, that this Order of Beings of a superior Nature (a considerable Number of them at least) will be much superior to us in their moral Character ; that is, will be more perfectly good and righteous. But the Favour of God will always be proportioned to the Virtue and Goodness of his Creatures ; from whence it follows, that Beings of this kind must enjoy a greater Share of Divine Favour than ourselves. Upon this Ground we may proceed farther, and infer, that they are admitted to nearer Communications with God, and blessed with his more especial Presence : And since their natural Excellencies of Knowledge and Power, joined with high Degrees of Purity and Goodness, may render them fit Instruments in the providential Government of the World, it is not unlikely but they may

S E R M O N IX. 277

may be employed by God in this great Work: For though the Supreme Being be every-where present, and hath every-where an infinite Power of Action, and consequently cannot need the least Services of his Creatures, ---- yet we see, upon some Occasions, he uses the Agency of Second Causes; and therefore he may fairly be presumed to employ the Powers of these excellent Beings in compassing Events suitable to their Powers. Thus far we may advance upon the Principles of common Reason.

But, if we consult the Holy Scriptures, we shall find, that the Point I am upon is there confirmed beyond all Possibility of Doubt. The holy Psalmist, in his rapturous Address of Adoration and Praise contained in the ciii. *Psalm*, calls upon the Angels to bless the Lord:—*Bless the Lord, ye his Angels;—ye that excel in Strength, hearkening unto the Voice of his Word:—Bless ye the Lord, all ye his Hosts;—ye Ministers of his that do his Pleasure.* [ver. 20, 21.]

Agreeably, in other Places, we find mention made of the *Angels of Light*;---of *Angels which stand round about the Throne of God*;---of the *elect Angels*, and the like. It will be needless to multiply Passages to this Purpose,

278 S E R M O N IX.

or to be over-sollicitous in producing Citations to which no one can be a Stranger.

That there are such Beings, is, I hope, thus far clear: But we cannot securely advance much farther, or determine many Particulars, concerning that World which is to us invisible. There will be none Occasion therefore to enter on any of those curious Enquiries which have sometimes perplexed contemplative Men, and those who wanted better Work to employ themselves about. Disquisitions of this kind are as useless and unprofitable, as they are troublesome; and, when we have tired ourselves in the Search, all that we shall gain will be this; That we shall be satisfied at last, that the Point we have been pursuing is entirely beyond our Reach.

Thus much, however, it will be proper to note farther under this Head (because the Holy Scriptures are our Guide here),---That there was a vast Number of those excellent Beings originally created in a State of Innocence: But, in Process of Time (*when*, indeed, we cannot precisely determine), a considerable Part of them withdrew from their Obedience; and, having forfeited their Innocence, they lost with it that Happiness which

S E R M O N IX. 279

which was the Consequence and Reward of Innocence; for they were driven out from the Presence of God, and *their Place was no more seen in Heaven.*

Hence arises the Distinction between good and bad Angels; the latter of which being confederated under Satan their Head, and envying the Happiness of Mankind, are making frequent Attempts upon us, either to seduce us from our Obedience to God, or to bring those Misfortunes upon us which a wise Providence shall permit. Hence our Adversary the Devil is set forth in Scripture *as a roaring Lion, going about, seeking whom he may devour.*

But the Discourse I am upon is confined chiefly to Good Angels; concerning whom there is this farther to be noted; that they are represented in Scripture, not as a confused Multitude, but as a regular and well-ordered Society; as Beings differing probably from one another in Degrees of Perfection,---most certainly in Order and Station. *Thus Michael and his Angels;* that is, those which were subordinate to him, and subject to his Direction, are said to fight with the Dragon and his Angels. Upon which we may remark this, by the way, that Society and Govern-

280 S E R M O N IX.

ment is not peculiar to fallen Man : It hath a Place even amongst these innocent and excellent Spirits : It serves to keep up a Regularity even in Heaven itself : The Supreme Being cannot but approve it ;---for he is the Author, not of Confusion, but of Order.

II. I shall now proceed to the Second Head proposed ; *viz.* To observe somewhat concerning the Nature of Angels, as it is set forth to us in the Text : *They are Spirits.* A pure Spirit, in Strictness of Speech, signifies a Being entirely devoid of Parts ; and by consequence, of itself, not the Object of any of our Senses. That there are such Beings, we may be assured from barely considering our own Minds : We are conscious of numberless Perceptions ; we are capable of discerning Truth, and of deducing Inferences from things already known ;---we can, by the mere Exertion of our Wills, produce a Variety of Actions ; and either begin new Motions, or resist and stop those which have been produced already. But mere Matter is incapable of beginning any Action whatsoever : It can neither move, nor perceive, nor think, nor reason. We conclude therefore, that there must be a Principle within us, distinct

S E R M O N IX. 281

distinct from Matter, from whence these Operations flow; and this is what we mean by *Spirit*.

Now, if Angels are intelligent (as we are sure they are), then the same Arguments whereby we prove the Spirituality of our own Minds, will equally conclude with regard to these Beings too.—But then, as the Souls of Men do not cease to be Spirits, by their Union with the Body, and by their employing it as an Instrument in their Operations;---so it is possible the Angels themselves may actuate, and be united to, some finer Systems, suitable to that divine and more excellent State which they enjoy; nor is it either absurd or impious to suppose, that to exist and act without any Conjunction with Matter, may be the peculiar Privilege of the Supreme Being himself.

But, be this as it will; whether they be pure Spirits, or cloathed with some finer Body,---yet they may be, and probably are, of themselves invifible; and accordingly, in all those Instances of their Appearance recorded in Holy Scripture, they must have assumed some grosser Body, the Object of our Senses.

From considering the Spirituality of their
Nature

282 S E R M O N IX.

Nature in general, we may pass on to those Perfections, which are founded in, and dependent upon, it. Such as is,

1. Active Power. Mere Matter, as I have observed already, is incapable of exerting any Action; and therefore a Power of Action can belong only to an immaterial or spiritual Being. Now, that the Angels are endued with far greater active Powers than Men are, will appear from those Arguments which I alleged before to prove their Existence. It is this which peculiarly fits them to be the Messengers of God's Will, and the Executioners of his great Commands. Hence they are by the Psalmist said to *excel in Strength*; and by *St. Paul* they are termed *The mighty Angels*. In other Places, the sacred Writers, to represent God to us in the highest Terms of Majesty and Terror, call him *The Lord of Sabaoth*, or *Hofhs*; for he sendeth forth his holy Angels as his powerful Armies, either to protect the Innocent; or to afflict and punish the Guilty. It may perhaps give us a yet higher Notion of their active Power, to consider, that it was an Angel who slew, in one Night, all the First-born in the Land of *Egypt*; and, upon another Occasion, destroyed an Hundred and Eighty

S E R M O N IX. 283

Eighty Thousand in the Army of the *Assyrians*.

Let us, in the next place, observe somewhat concerning their Knowledge and Wisdom ; a Perfection which may, in like manner, be evinced from those very Arguments which prove their Being. This is farther confirmed to us by what we are taught in Scripture ; where our Blessed Saviour intimates the vast Extent of their Knowledge, and their great Superiority above Men, in this regard.—*But of that Day*, says he, [speaking of the Day of Judgment] *knoweth no Man ; no, not the Angels which are in Heaven*. This plainly suggests, that many things are known to the Angels which are concealed from us. Agreeably, we find, that they have been frequently employed in those Affairs which require the greatest Wisdom and Capacity. Thus, in former Times, God sent his Angels to Men, to entertain and commune with them ;—to instruct them in his sacred Will ; and sometimes to signify to them those great things which should hereafter come to pass : Nay, the very Law of *Moses* itself is said to have been delivered by the Ministry of Angels.—And, not to insist on other Passages to this purpose, the Wisdom of *David* is compared

284 S E R M O N IX.

pared with that of *an Angel of God, to discern good and bad*; and again, *My Lord is wise, according to the Wisdom of an Angel of God, to know all things that are in the Earth.* [2 Sam. xiv. 17—20.]

I shall remark One Perfection more, which belongs to these Beings; and that is, Purity and Righteousness. These they possess in much higher Degrees than we Mortals are capable of; and therefore they are termed the holy and elect Angels: Nay, they are set forth to us as Patterns for our Imitation; and we are required by our Blessed Saviour to pray, *That God's Will may be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven.* It is upon this Principle that their very Happiness is founded; and, were they less holy, they would be less excellent, and less favoured by the Almighty. It was a Defection from this State of Purity and Righteousness which occasioned the Expulsion of the evil Angels; who, unwilling to obey God, became therefore unworthy of his Presence. How pure must those be, who are constantly under the more immediate Eye of the Almighty; of that God, *who is of purer Sight than to behold Iniquity.*

I should now pass on to the remaining Heads to be treated on this Subject: But the
Matter

S E R M O N IX. 285

Matter is too copious, and will furnish out another Discourse hereafter. I will not, however, close this without some proper and useful Reflections.

I conceive a good Argument may be drawn from the Consideration of what I have now advanced, to abate our Pride and Vanity; to teach us more moderate Opinions of ourselves, and of our several Perfections and Capacities. We are too fond of thinking, that we are placed in the highest Class of Beings; and that, as there are no Creatures more wise and perfect than ourselves,—so there is nothing beyond our Reach: This Principle, which flatters human Nature by far too much, is not only prejudicial to *that* Humility which ought to prostrate us before the Divine Being,—but likewise extends itself farther, and mixes in the ordinary Concerns of Life. Men are exceedingly prone to prefer themselves before others of their own Kind, on account of I know not what fancied Accomplishments; and, whilst they imagine there are no superior Creatures with whom they may compare themselves, they grow insolent and presumptuous: They prove rude to their Equals, and disdain and trample upon their Inferiors, in a vain Confidence,
that

286 S E R M O N IX.

that there are no Beings more excellent than themselves. But we have seen, that (whatever our Perfections may be) — there are Creatures abundantly superior to us ;---Creatures, rising perhaps one above another in an endless Order ; and of whom the very meanest may as much exceed us, as we do the Beasts that perish. This comparative View of our Condition will teach us to make a truer Estimate of ourselves : We shall discern our own Poverty the better, by looking up, and considering the superior State of the sacred Angels, who minister before the Throne of God, and continually view that Glory, which no Man can see, and live.---Let us think, how little the completest Accomplishments of a poor Mortal must appear in the Eyes of those Beings, who are possessed of so much higher Perfection ; and how vain our nicest Schemes of Wisdom and Policy must be in their Sight, who are favoured with such an extensive Knowledge of Things. This, surely, if any thing, will make us modest and reserved ;---and not to presume too much on that Wisdom, which, to Beings of an higher Order, is Folly.

From what hath been observed concerning the Nature and Perfection of the Angels,
I may

S E R M O N IX. 287

I may take occasion farther to exhort you to make continual Improvements in Piety and Virtue. These, as they are Perfections of the most excellent Kind, and without which, Wisdom and Power are of no Consequence, —so they are in a great measure within our Reach: I mean, by the Grace of God assisting us, we are able to make constant Advances this way; and so to come nearer to the principal Perfections of those Beings, which are the immediate Attendants upon God. There is implanted in our Nature a Desire of Excellence: This, methinks, should put us on the immediate Pursuit of those Perfections we are capable of attaining; and the Ambition of being like the Angels in Holiness and Virtue, should not let us rest one Moment without endeavouring to attain this End. But, over and above this, it becomes us to consider farther, that Virtue is not only the principal Perfection of our Nature, but the Ground and Foundation of our Happiness. The Favour of God will entirely depend upon it; and, as the Attainment of Virtue is the instituted Condition of future Enjoyment, so is it likewise a natural Qualification for it. It is, upon this account, that the good Angels enjoy themselves; and it
was,

288 S E R M O N IX.

was, upon account of deserting this, that the evil Angels were banished from God's Presence: Nay, though they had still retained their Place in Heaven, yet, by forfeiting their Innocence, they must have lost their Happiness too. The Dominion of inward Desires, and the Consciousness of Guilt, must ever disquiet them; and, whilst they were incapable of enjoying themselves, it was impossible they should enjoy any thing else.

Here then let us fix ourselves; ever remembering, that it is as much our Interest as our Honour to be virtuous; and that we cannot to any purpose serve ourselves, without endeavouring to please God.

Now to God the Father, God the Son,
Ec. Amen.

S E R-

S E R M O N X.

On the Nature and Employment of
Good Angels.

P A R T II.

H E B. i. 14.

*Are they not all ministering Spirits, sent forth
to minister for them which shall be Heirs of
Salvation?*

TH E S E Words I shall consider,
without any relation to what goes
before them, as a single independ-
ent Sentence, representing to us the Nature
and Employment of good Angels. It is sup-
posed in the Text, that such Beings there are.
It will be proper therefore,

In the First place, To assign the Reasons of this
Belief concerning the Existence of Angels.

V O L. II.

U

Secondly,

290 S E R M O N X.

Secondly, To treat concerning the Nature of them.

Thirdly, Concerning their Employment.

They are ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for them which shall be Heirs of Salvation. And,

Lastly, To apply the Doctrine to be advanced under these Heads, to its proper Uses and Purposes.

As to the Reasons on which our Belief, concerning the Existence of Angels, is built, we may observe, that this is not a late or novel Opinion, but what hath found Entertainment both amongst *Jews* and *Gentiles*, even in the earliest Ages. As to the former, it is remarked as a notable Singularity in the *Sadducees*, That they acknowledged neither Angel nor Spirit: But other Sects amongst the *Jews* acknowledged both. The *Gentiles* are well known to have believed what they called their Inferior Gods, the Ministers of the Supreme Will; which Notion, when distinctly explained, will fall in with the Doctrine I am now maintaining.

We are farther supported, in the Point before us, from the Natures and Reasons of Things. We cannot suppose, that the Divine

S E R M O N X. 291

vine Goodness (which is infinitely fruitful) is exhausted in the Production of Man : As therefore there are a vast Variety of Beings inferior to us in Degrees of Excellence, and descending one below another in the Scale of Perfection,---what more reasonable than to suppose, there must be other Beings, superior to us, rising still one above another in an endless Order ? And, if this be admitted, then we argue farther, That, as these must be endued with nobler and more excellent Powers,---so it is probable withal, that they are employed by God in the providential Government of the World ; that is, that they *are ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for those which shall be Heirs of Salvation.*

We may argue, lastly, from several Passages of Holy Scripture. Thus the Holy Psalmist calls upon the Angels to bless the Lord : — *Bless the Lord, ye his Angels ; ye that excel in Strength, hearkening unto the Voice of his Word : Bless the Lord, all ye his Hosts ; ye Ministers of his that do his Pleasure.* Agreeably, in other Places, we find Mention made of the *Angels of Light ; of Angels which stand round about the Throne of God ; of the Elect Angels,* and the like.

II. The Existence of Angels being sup-

292 S E R M O N X.

ported in this Way of Proof, the next thing to be considered, is, The Nature of them. They are Spirits; that is, Beings devoid of Parts; and, consequently, of themselves, not the Objects of any of our Senses. But yet, as the Mind of Man, though spiritual, doth yet act in Conjunction with a Body, and uses it as its Instrument in the Operations it performs;---so it is probable the Angels themselves may actuate some finer Systems, ---and, by the Use of them, become to *us* visible. It is a pious Opinion at least, that to exist and act without any Conjunction with Matter, is the peculiar Privilege of the Supreme Being himself.

From considering the Spirituality of their Nature, we may pass on to those Perfections which are founded in, and dependent upon, it. Such is,

1. Active Power. In this respect they vastly exceed us, as will appear by considering those very Arguments by which we prove their Being. It is this which fits them to be the Messengers of the Divine Will, and the Executioners of his great Commands. Hence they are, by the Psalmist, said to *excel in Strength*; and *St. Paul* terms them, *The mighty Angels*.

The

S E R M O N X. 293

The next Perfection is Knowledge and Wisdom. This likewise will appear from those very Considerations from which we conclude their Existence. But the Point will be evident beyond all Question, by recollecting what we are taught in Scripture. Our Blessed Saviour intimates to us the vast Extent of their Knowledge, and their great Superiority above Men in this regard. *But of that Day, saith he, [speaking of the Day of Judgment] knoweth no Man; no, not the Angels which are in Heaven.* This plainly suggests, that many things are known to the Angels, which are entirely concealed from us.

I shall remark One Perfection more, which belongs to these Beings; and that is, Purity and Righteousness. These they possess in much higher Degree than we Mortals are capable of; and therefore they are termed in Scripture, *The Holy and Elect Angels*; and we are required, by our Blessed Lord, to pray, *That God's Will may be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven.*

I shall not pursue these Particulars any farther, having distinctly treated them in the former Discourse: It will be sufficient to have recollected thus much, in order to in-

294 S E R M O N X.

roduce the Third Head I design to handle on this Subject; viz.

III. To make some Observations concerning the Employment of the Blessed Angels, *They are ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister for them which shall be Heirs of Salvation.* And,

1. They minister before God; they are his glorious Retinue; Attendants on his awful Throne; and Beings that constantly celebrate his Praise. Agreeably, the Prophet *Isaiah*, in a Vision, represents God as *sitting upon a Throne, high and lifted up; and above it stood the Seraphim;—and one cried unto another, and said, Holy,---Holy,---Holy, is the Lord of Hosts; the whole Earth is full of his Glory.* [*Isai. vi. 1, 2, 3.*] *St. John*, in like manner, gives us this Account;—*I beheld, and heard the Voice of many Angels round about the Throne:—And the Number of them was Ten thousand times Ten thousand, and Thousands of Thousands;—saying, with a loud Voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive Power, and Riches, and Wisdom, and Strength, and Honour, and Glory, and Blessing.* How happy must this Employment be! To be the
Witnesses

S E R M O N X. 295

Witnesses of the Divine Majesty ;---to dwell in his immediate and glorious Presence ;---to praise and adore the infinitely adorable Being ;---and to live under the constant Sense of his Favour. This is the State of the Angels at present ; and, if we endeavour to imitate them in the Perfection of Holiness, this will be the State of good Men in the other World : For our Saviour himself hath told us, we shall hereafter be as the Angels ; admitted to a Happiness, though differing in Degree, yet the same in Kind.

But what I am most concerned to note under this Head, is, The Ministration of Angels with regard to Men. I have had Occasion to observe heretofore, That God is *everywhere* present, and can therefore, if he pleases, *every-where* exercise his own immediate Power : Yet it is not unreasonable to suppose, that he should sometimes employ subordinate Beings in the Execution of his Will : Though he is able immediately to act every thing in the ordinary Course of Providence, yet, we see, he is pleased to transact many things by the Agency even of Men themselves : How much greater Reason is there to imagine, that the Angels, Beings so much superior to us in Wisdom and Power, should bear a Part

296 S E R M O N X.

in great Events? But, if we might conclude thus much by arguing from Principles of Reason,---the Scriptures will give us farther Light. It will appear from those Writings, that God hath formerly employed them for this Purpose; and that they are still the Ministers of God in the Management of worldly Affairs.

Most of the Messages which were heretofore delivered to Mankind, were delivered to them by the Mediation of Angels. Thus the Promise of a Son, in his old Age, was given to *Abraham* by the Ministration of these excellent Beings. [*Gen. xviii.*] The Family of *Lot* was saved from the terrible Destruction brought on the *Sodomites* by like extraordinary Counsels. Not to insist on the several Appearances of this kind to *Gideon*,---to *Daniel*,---to the *Virgin Mary*,---to her Husband *Joseph*, and the *Shepherds*, on the Nativity of Christ; other Instances might be cited; but it is unnecessary to enlarge on a Point so clear.

Nor have the Angels been employed only in carrying Instructions to Men, and revealing to them the Secrets of Providence,---but likewise to assist them in their Affairs, and to protect them from those Dangers to which
they

S E R M O N X. 297

they are exposed. Agreeably to this, when *Elisha* was besieged by an Army of the *Syrians*, he was protected by a more powerful Host, though invisible to common Eyes; and the Psalmist tells us, *That the Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.* [Ps. xxxiv. 7.] We have frequent Instances of this in the Sacred Scripture. *Jacob* acknowledges, *That an Angel had redeemed him from all Evil.* [Gen. xlviii. 16.] *Elijah* was supported under the Persecution of *Jezebel*, by the Assistance of an Angel; [1 Kings xix.] and *Daniel* (to name none others) was preserved in the Lion's Den by a like supernatural Ministration: For thus he himself acknowledges; *My God hath sent his Angels, and hath shut the Lions Mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him Innocency was found in me.* [Dan. vi. 22.]

But, if such Care was used by these charitable Beings in the Defence and Protection of the antient Patriarchs, we may reasonably presume, that at least as much is used in the Behalf of Christians; especially, since our Blessed Lord himself hath been pleased to dignify human Nature so far as to unite it to the Divine, and to redeem the World by the

Sacrifice

298 S E R M O N X.

Sacrifice of himself. It is true, indeed, we are not now Witnesses of these extraordinary Appearances. Miracles are now ceased, and God doth not manifest himself in so astonishing a manner as formerly. Yet still we are under the Superintendency of the same Providence ; and preserved by Interpositions equally real, though less apparent.

A nice and observing Person cannot but recollect many Passages of his Life, in which he seems to have been conducted by an higher Power ; in which he hath declined Danger, he scarce knows why, and escaped it, he scarce knows how. How often are Men impelled, by certain unaccountable Persuasions, either *to do*, or *forbear*, a thing, upon which (as hath afterwards appeared by the Event) the whole Fortunes of their Lives have turned ? —Unaccountable, I say, must these Persuasions be, unless we refer them to some higher Cause : And to what Cause can we better ascribe them, than to the Suggestion of Angels ?

To the same purpose we may observe (and the more we observe it, the more will it raise our Wonder), that in our tender Years we are exposed to numberless Accidents, against which we are incapable of guarding. The
helpless

S E R M O N X. 299

helpless Child feels Wants which it is incapable of expressing; and the heedless Youth runs himself into Dangers, which, as he discerns not, so he can do nothing in order to escape them: And yet the greatest Part of us have got through all these Difficulties; and, when we look back, we are surprised. But whence is it, that we surmount these Dangers?—That, even without our Knowledge, we succeed better, than we could have done by the greatest human Foresight? The Answer to this Question is easy, if we suppose the Ministration of Angels;—and that those, who are incapable of providing for themselves, are the Charge of Heaven.

To proceed: If there be Reason to suppose, that these Beings are concerned in promoting our *temporal* Welfare, there is still greater to imagine, that they interpose to assist and promote our *spiritual*. For this is a Point of the utmost Importance to us; and, as it tends so highly to the Glory of God, it must be suitable to Beings so holy and benevolent, to regard it with a proportionable Care. Who can say, but these Beings may, under the Direction of the Sacred Spirit, be sometimes employed in the ordinary Ministrations of Grace? Who knows, but they may suggest
good

300 S E R M O N X.

good Thoughts to our Minds,---and whisper secret Dissuafives from Sin? As this is by no means impossible, so it may not, on several accounts, be thought improbable.

But, however this Matter be, yet that they are, some way or other, concerned in our spiritual Affairs, is likely, from considering the Opposition which evil Spirits make to our Salvation. If *these* are so active and diligent in urging us with Temptations, and laying Difficulties in our Ways of Duty, we may well suppose, that these good Beings are as vigilant and careful on the other Side: That they aid and assist us, either by withstanding these Adversaries of our Salvation,---or by warning us of our Danger;---or, in some Cases, by supporting us to overcome it: That the good Angels are employed in thus withstanding and counter-acting evil ones, is farther probable; not only from the Opposition which is between them, but also from the Conduct of Divine Providence in ejecting these evil Beings out of Heaven. God might, if he had pleased, have accomplished this by an immediate Act of his own Power: But yet he made use of the Agency and Power of good Spirits to this Purpose: And *Michael and his Angels* are said to have fought with *the Dragon and his Angels*. What

S E R M O N X. 301

What hath been hitherto observed, concerning the Interest which the Angels have in our most important Affairs, is farther supported by recollecting what *St. Paul* tells us; *viz.* That they are present in the religious Assemblies of Christians;---no doubt, as well to assist, as be the Witnesses of our Devotion. *For this Cause*, saith he, *the Woman ought to have Power over her Head*, [that is, to be covered] *because of the Angels.* [1 Cor. xi. 10.] What our Saviour tells us is remarkable; That *there is Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth*;—and that the Soul of *Lazarus*, when separated from the Body, was *carried by Angels into Abraham's Bosom.*

To conclude these Accounts of Scripture, we are informed, lastly, That these Ministers of Providence are to attend the Supreme Judge at the last Great Day, and to be employed by him in the mighty Work of the Resurrection, and assembling together the Elect.—*And he shall send his Angels with a great Sound of a Trumpet; and they shall gather together his Elect from the Four Winds, from one End of Heaven unto the other.* These are the principal things recorded in Scripture concerning the Employment of Angels.

There is indeed a farther Opinion concerning

302 S E R M O N X.

ing them maintained by some; *viz.* That every Man hath his Guardian-Angel assigned him, to take particular Care of his Person and Concerns. Whether this Opinion be true or no, it may perhaps be a very difficult Matter to determine. That there *are* such Guardian-Angels assigned to every Man, cannot be so *certainly* concluded from a few Instances amongst the antient Patriarchs: Their Case was extraordinary; and it would be no small Degree of Presumption to claim all the Privileges which were vouchsafed to them.

I will not enter into this Point; but only observe, That whether this be the Case or no;—whether we are each of us the particular Charge of One Angel, or the general Care of Many,—we may rest assured, that our important Interests are in very safe Hands. Beings so benevolent as these, will not neglect us, unless we neglect ourselves:—So wise, will readily discern *when*, and in *what* Cases, we need their Assistance;—and *so* active, will easily relieve us on every emergent Occasion. To which we may add, That as they are commissioned by God himself for this Purpose (for they are said in the Text to be sent forth to minister);—as they
act

act under God's more immediate Eye ; and have committed to them the Care of those for whom Christ himself died,—we have the strongest Assurances of their Vigilance and Activity. — *Lord, what is Man, that thou art so careful of him ? Or the Son of Man, that thou thus regardest him ?*

It remains now, under the Last Head, to apply the Doctrine hitherto advanced, to its proper Uses and Purposes. And,

I. We should learn from hence to adore the Mercy and Goodness of God, who hath been pleased to take such ample Care of us, and to ordain these Services of Angels in such a wonderful Order : He hath not only created us, — endued us with many useful Powers and Faculties,—placed us in a World enriched with all that is necessary in Life ;—but still, farther to promote our Happiness, and to guard us against Ill, *He giveth his Angels Charge over us, to keep us in all our Ways.* He honoureth us with the Services of his own glorious Retinue ; and dispatches, for our Relief, the immediate Attendants on his Throne. Exceeding heedless therefore must we be, if we take no Notice of a Care so extraordinary ; and, beyond measure, ungrateful, if we do not entertain Sentiments suitable

304 S E R M O N X.

ble to the Greatness of those Favours we have received. We are incapable of repaying the Goodness and Bounty of our Creator : He needeth not our best Services ; nor can he receive any Advantage from them : Yet still a grateful Heart,—as it is proper in us, so is it acceptable to him ; and, since we are unable to make better Returns, he will graciously approve our Praise.—*Great and marvellous are thy Works, Lord God Almighty ; just and true are thy Ways, thou King of Saints !* [Rev. xv. 3.]

We may infer, in the next place, from the Doctrine delivered concerning the Ministry of Angels, the Reasonableness of *Trusting* in God in all Circumstances of Distress and Difficulty. The Affairs of this World, we see, are not left at Uncertainties, but conducted by a wise and a good Providence. They are influenced either by the immediate Agency of God himself,---or (which is to us the same) by the subordinate Ministry of Angels : So that, whatever our Difficulties may be, and how much soever beyond any human Power to repair, yet we are subject to the secret Superintendency of God,---and a Power *great*, though *unseen*, may aid us. Little Reason therefore is there either for Presumption or Despair ;

S E R M O N X. 305

Despair; the most hopeful Projects may be blasted on the sudden; and therefore we ought not to build too much on human Contrivances:---And Affairs, almost desperate, may receive new Life; and therefore we ought not to be dejected and comfortless. We have a memorable Instance of what I have now mentioned in the Case of *Hezekiah*. The good King was reduced to the utmost Streights by the Invasion of *Sennacherib*; whom, in all human Accounts, he was unable to resist. But, see the Event: The Interposition of One Angel, commissioned by God, gave a new Turn to things: And those who threatened, with such a Prospect of Success, Desolation to others, were, in One Night, almost destroyed themselves. The same Providence, which exerted itself in so extraordinary a Manner on this Occasion, still watches over the Affairs of Mankind; ever ready to abate the Insolence of the Proud, and to strengthen the Hands of the Humble.—In this View, *We may be troubled on every Side, and yet not distressed; perplexed, and yet not in Despair: Though persecuted, we are not forsaken; and though cast down, we are not destroyed.* [2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.]

Again: We may learn, from the Doctrine

VOL. II.

X

delivered,

306 S E R M O N X.

delivered, what our Behaviour ought to be towards the good Angels; *viz.* That we ought to entertain very honourable Notions of them, as Beings of a superior Order, and in the highest State of Favour with God;— that we should respect them very highly, as the immediate Instruments of many of those Blessings which God conveys to us by their Ministration. All this will readily be allowed by every serious and pious Christian: But we must take Care that this Respect (so reasonable whilst kept within due Bounds) do not degenerate into Superstition and Impiety; and, whilst we fix our Eyes on Second Causes, we should not forget the First. Be they the immediate Authors of Good to us; —yet they are not the original Causes of it, but act in Subordination to an higher Being, whose Ministers they are. They must not therefore be put on a Level with God; nor receive that Worship which he hath appropriated to himself: God is jealous of his Honour, and will by no means give it to another.

I am sensible, indeed, that the Adversaries, with whom we are to deal on this Head, have invented a Distinction to save the Matter: They tell us, That they pay
supreme

S E R M O N X. 307

supreme Worship to God only ; and that they honour the Angels with that Worship which is *inferior* and suitable to their Natures. But what Foundation is there in Scripture for such a Distinction concerning religious Worship ? Our Saviour tells us, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve* ; and *St. Paul*, in exprefs Terms, condemns the *Worshipping of Angels* as a Departure from Christ [*Col. ii. 18.*] It is remarkable to this purpose, that when *St. John* [as he represents it in the prophetic Vision] *fell down to worship before the Feet of the Angel* ; then said he unto him, *See thou do it not ; for I am thy Fellow-servant, and of thy Brethren the Prophets ; and of them which keep the Sayings of this Book. Worship thou God.* This Passage is so full and clear, that one might think it should be an eternal Caution to Christians ; and that none should ever presume to offer that Worship to Angels, which, it is clear, they must refuse with Horror. That they are conscious to many of our Actions, is certain ; and, if they are so, how must they be displeased and dissatisfied with us, when we misplace *Divine Honour* upon them ; and build our Respect to them upon the Ruins of our Duty to God ? No doubt

308 S E R M O N X.

these excellent Beings must have a quick Sense of the Divine Glory, and be exceedingly jealous of God's Honour. If this be the Case, our Behaviour must then be most acceptable to them, when it expresses the deepest Sense of our Duty to God.

Farther : From considering the Ministration of Angels, we may learn what Obligations we are under to Humility. The Holy Angels, so much superior to us both in Nature and Station, do yet vouchsafe to minister to us ; to attend our Affairs, and to assist us in Difficulties. How much more should we condescend to, and honour, one another, who all of us are Partakers of the same common Nature ; and, bating some accidental Differences, are upon a Level. But, it seems, the Differences of Station and Fortune are often more attended to, than the Condition of our Nature ; and some think, upon that Account, they have a right to treat others as they please. But be this Difference, so much insisted on, great and important as it will,—the Superiority of the Holy Angels above the highest of us, is greater than that of the highest above the meanest : They are the glorious Ministers of God, and in the greatest Favour with the Most High ; yet they deign to

S E R M O N X. 309

to take Notice of, and to minister to, us; and *Lazarus*, a poor Beggar, the Contempt of the Rich Man, is the Charge of Angels. Methinks, a little Reflection on this Point might teach us, that Humility doth not make us mean; but rather, that the greatest and most substantial Honour is founded in Condescension.

Once more: We should learn Charity from considering the Point I have hitherto insisted on. It is the Care of these noble Beings to perform things not only great and surprising, but highly useful. They imitate in this the great Author of Nature, who not *only is good*, but *doth it*: They minister to our Wants; they help us in Danger; they forward us in the Ways of lasting Happiness; they rejoice at our Conversion; and grieve, no doubt, when we are so unhappy, as to take no Care of ourselves. Next to our concurring with them in the various Methods of promoting our own Happiness, it becomes us to imitate these good Beings in setting forward the Happiness of one another. This is the best way of shewing ourselves truly sensible of the Advantages we enjoy by their Ministration: This will make the present Life most comfortable to us; and prepare

310 SERMON X.

us for that heavenly State, in which (being joined with these excellent Natures) we shall spend an Eternity in Love and Praise.

Now to God the Father, God the Son,
&c. Amen.

SER-

S E R M O N XI.

Providence concerned in the Revolutions of Government.

For MAY 29.

ISAIAH xliv. 24, 25, 26.

Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, and he that formed thee from the Womb; I am the Lord, that maketh all things; — that stretcheth forth the Heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the Earth by myself;

That frustrateth the Tokens of Liars, and maketh Diviners mad; that turneth wise Men backward, and maketh their Knowledge foolish; That confirmeth the Word of his Servant, and performeth the Counsel of his Messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the Cities of Judah, Ye shall be built; and I will raise up the decayed Places thereof.

THE Words now read contain a Prophecy of the Restoration of the Jewish State, after the long Captivity in Babylon: And it is remarkable, that

312 S E R M O N XI.

this was uttered, not only a considerable Time before its Accomplishment, but before that very Captivity of the *Jews* had happened. An evident Illustration, this, both of the Divine Foresight, and the Authority, of that Prophet who foretold it. There is a Solemnity in the Words which greatly deserves Attention.

Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, and he that formed thee from the Womb. These Expressions have a particular Force as applied on the present Occasion: For they carried back the Minds of those Persons, to whom they were delivered, to those Two memorable Events; The Redemption of the *Jews* from *Egypt*, and the First Formation of their State; ---both of them effected by the manifest Interposition of that Being who here foretold their Restoration; and they seem purposely intended to confirm their Hope, when such Hope should become necessary, notwithstanding any unpromising Appearances to the contrary.

To go on: *I am he that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the Heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the Earth by myself.* Here the Divine Efficacy is represented in brighter Colours; and therefore a Reliance on it, in difficult Circumstances, is enforced hereby
more

S E R M O N XI. 313

more strongly : For the Deliverance of a single People is a much less Instance of Power than the Formation both of the Heavens and the Earth,---as it is easier (pardon the Expression) to suspend the Laws of Nature, than to establish them.

Farther : *That frustrateth the Tokens of Liars, and maketh Diviners mad.* Though these Words do by no means represent to us such astonishing Marks of Power as the former, yet they are full as apposite to the Prophet's Purpose : For they had a particular Reference to the Matter in view, the Restoration of the *Jewish* People, as pointing out the Measures which Divine Wisdom chose to make use of ; namely, The Infatuation of Counsels, and Disappointment of Devices, formed to counteract the gracious Designs of Providence.

Again : *That confirmeth the Word of his Servant, and performeth the Counsel of his Messengers.* There had been several Instances of this Kind in the Administration of the *Jewish* Government ; and whatever had been predicted, by authorised Prophets, had been punctually accomplished. To these Accomplishments the People are here referred, as the surest and most unquestionable Proof of
a like

314 S E R M O N XI.

a like Steadiness in every Divine Determination.

This leads on to the great Point intended : *That saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited ; and to the Cities of Judah, Ye shall be built ; and I will raise up the decayed Places thereof.* These Words contain the direct Prophecy itself, which the preceding introduced in order to enforce a more strict Attention to it : And if any Question shall arise, whether they relate to the Deliverance from the *Babylonish* Captivity, the Words just after will decide it, where *Cyrus*, by whose Decree this Restoration was immediately effected, is expressly mentioned as its Author.

But what Concern hath this remote Prophecy with Men in later Times ? Can this be understood as predicting the Restoration of the *English* Government when it had been once subverted ? By no means. And yet good Instruction may be learnt from it, of Service in every Age : For it appears from hence, that Providence concerns itself in the great Turns and Revolutions of Government ; and may suggest to us, at all times, proper Measures of Conduct. On the present Occasion it may be of singular Service ; and this I shall endeavour to represent.

I. To

S E R M O N XI. 315

- I. To this purpose I shall observe, in the First Place, That God doth more especially interest himself in the great Affairs of Government ; in particular, for the Restitution of such Forms as serve the general Intendment of Providence.
- II. That the Manner of the Divine Action, in this regard, is not so much by the astonishing Interposition of miraculous Power, as by a secret Influence on the Wills of Men ; by an Infatuation of Counsels ; by a Disappointment of Devices ; and, as it is expressed in the Text, by *making the Diviners mad.*
- III. What hath been noted in general on the foregoing Heads, shall be applied to the particular Purpose of this Day. And then,
- IV. Such Matters of Instruction or Caution shall be offered, as most naturally arise from the foregoing Discourse.

I. That a Providence of some sort is exercised over the World, may be inferred from considering God as our Creator : For the very same Reasons, whatever they be, which determined the Supreme Being to create it,
must

316 S E R M O N XI.

must operate likewise towards its Preservation. And as, from the original Frame of Things, we must conclude the absolute Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of their Author, so these Attributes, thus established, may be alledged as Proofs of Providence ; it being inconceivable, that their genuine Effects should be restrained, whilst proper Objects seem to demand their Exercise.

This Doctrine in the general hath been received, in all Ages, by the far greatest Part of Mankind : But yet their Explications of it have not been always clear ; some extending it much farther than others have done, and applying it to Purposes which others have denied or questioned. To settle this Matter is of considerable Importance, and deserves Attention.

Some have maintained, That as nothing could have been produced without the Operation of a First Cause, so a Continuance in Being must be owing to the same Energy, by which it was first produced ; Preservation being nothing else but a continued Creation. But, without carrying our Speculations so far, it will appear, upon a little Reflection, that the Frame and System of Things, as making One beautiful Whole, cannot be supported without

S E R M O N XI. 317

without the uniform and continual Operation of the First Cause: For, upon this Foot only can we account for the constant and orderly Revolution of the heavenly Bodies;—the Adherence of the several Parts of Matter to one another;—the Growth of Plants;—the Life of Animals; and, in general, the Effects of what we call the Laws of Nature. And, as by this the general Frame of Things is supported, Providence, considered in this View, may be called *Natural*.

It should be observed, in the next Place, that this World is stocked with Numbers of Beings, who are capable of understanding, and admiring the Display of the Divine Perfections,—of enjoying God's Bounty, and of forwarding each others Happiness, by acting in a proper Manner: And, as they seem to have been placed here with that very View, this most beneficent Being must be presumed to inspect, and attend to, their Behaviour;—to approve their acting right, and to disapprove and condemn the contrary. This we may term a *moral* Providence.

Or, if it should be supposed, that this falls short of what is sometimes meant by that Term, the Defect may be supplied, by observing farther, that God is not to be considered

318 S E R M O N XI.

dered merely as a Spectator of Mens Actions, but likewise as their Governor: And this Interposition is manifested by his directing what is right, his forbidding what is wrong, and his Enforcement of both by the Sanction of Rewards and Punishments; I mean, by some present Good or Evil distributed in the present Life.

If it be enquired how this is done, let us remember, that, in the Exercise of *natural* Providence, not only the general Frame of Things is supported, but the several Powers of particular Beings continued. We may see, that by the Application of these, suitably to the moral Circumstances of Men, Reward or Punishment may arise: And as the necessary Effect of moral Good or Ill is, according to the present Constitution, a certain Proportion of Happiness or Misery, it is evident how a *natural* Providence aids the *moral*; and these concurring, may not improperly be called *mixed*.

There is another Distribution of Providence frequently to be observed in Writers on this Subject; I mean, *general* and *special*. The *general* respects the Whole of Things, or at least of Mankind; between which there is perhaps no great Matter of Difference; since the

the several Advantages of both are so connected, that the Interests of the one cannot be provided for without supporting the common Order of the other: And if Men once admit a general Providence, the Passage to a special, will be easy; this being none other than an Application of the general to the respective Cases of particular Societies or Persons.

Having proceeded thus far, it may be proper to observe, in reference to the main Design of this Head, that Man is endued with several Principles which lead to, and fit him for, Society. Such are social Affection, — the Gift of Speech, — the several Powers which enable him to serve not only himself but others; — together with the mutual Want Men have of each others Assistance. And since Man is so constituted, that he cannot subsist in any tolerable Manner without Society; — nor this Society be upheld but by certain Forms and Laws, the Providence I have been hitherto explaining must have a special Regard to this Case; and therefore I shall not scruple to affirm, that the Interests of Societies are much more the Object of Providence, than those of particular Persons; not only because these subordinate

Interests

320 S E R M O N XI.

Interests are included in the more general, but likewise because a common Good must always heighten and increase the private.

The Histories of the more early Ages of the World are so defective and obscure, that we can only guess at the Manner in which Societies were originally formed. Perhaps Men were first moved by that Instinct which we term Social Affection; encouraged by the Hopes of mutual Improvement; and, in some Cases, necessitated by the Want of mutual Defence against the Inroads of neighbouring Enemies: But, in all these respects, according to the foregoing State of Matters, Providence must have its Share: For this very Instinct itself is the Work of Providence; and Men, co-operating under the Influence of this Instinct, may be considered as its Instruments in producing the Effect they both lead to.

But there is another Consideration of greater Moment. In a Society formed, there must be Governors and Subjects;—Laws according to which Government is administered, and Sanctions whereby these Laws are supported. And for this purpose the Power of Life and Death will be found necessary: But no Man, considered merely as such, hath
Power

S E R M O N XI. 321

Power over another's Life. We must therefore recur to a higher Being ;--to Him, who, being the Author, must likewise be the absolute Disposer of Life ; and who, by ordering the Constitution of Things in such a Manner as to render the Exercise of this Power necessary, must be understood to authorise and confirm it.

If the first Formation and Establishment of civil Society were so far the Concern of Providence, we have equal Reason to presume the Preservation of it must be the proper Object of its Care ; especially where it hath been rightly constituted, and its Laws suited to the Interest and Happiness of the Whole. The Wisdom and Goodness of the Supreme Being must direct his Power in favour of well-regulated States ; and whilst the Members of them likewise concur for this Purpose, all that Security arises which the Nature of such Things admits of.

But it hath happened even in the best formed States, that by want of attending either to their proper End, or by deviating from those Measures by which this End must be obtained, much Irregularity hath arisen ; and the several Members have become in this Way degenerate. Such have rendered them-

322 S E R M O N XI.

selves unworthy of the Happiness they neglected : And the Growth of interfering Passions, with the political Infirmary which this must produce, hath made them incapable either of maintaining Order at home, or of defending themselves against Incurfions from abroad. We may add, that being left unsupported by an higher Power, and perhaps labouring under its Displeasure, they have fallen a Sacrifice to their own Corruptions, and been taught by the Loss of those Forms, under which social Happiness might have been obtained, to know the Importance of this Loss.

In most Cases of this Kind the Effect hath been irreparable, there being few Examples of a Government restored after a total Dissolution : Yet this hath happened, not only in the Instance which the Words of my Text foretold, but in that likewise which we have now the Happiness to commemorate : And if we reflect, it will plainly appear, that these great Events were not owing to any Wisdom or Power in the Persons restored, but to the secret, yet over-ruling, Influence of that Being *whose Kingdom ruleth over all*.

God's Goodness and Wisdom are infinite. And as I have concluded from hence both

S E R M O N X I. 323

the Reality of a Providence in general, and its Care of Societies in particular, we may observe how these same Perfections operated in the Instances before us ; the Blessings conferred being not only important, but in the Eye of the Divine Being suited to those Persons for whom they were intended. I wish we may always endeavour to deserve them, by answering those Ends for which they were conferred upon us.

It hath been observed already, that, in most Cases, those who have thrown away the Blessings of a good Government, have been left to lament the irreparable Loss of it ; whilst others have been favoured with a Restoration they had little Grounds to expect. In these Dispensations, however they may appear to us, there is at the Bottom a Reason ; for absolute Wisdom cannot act capriciously.

Thus, in regard to the *Jews*, the Restoration of their State was proper to prepare the Way for the Appearance of the *Messiah*. It had likewise another Effect : It restored the true Worship of God, which was extinguished every-where else ; and this very People, who had frequently revolted, and were now punished for their Idolatries, have been ever since preserved from that Guilt. Should it

324 S E R M O N XI.

likewise appear, that the Restoration we now commemorate hath in effect strengthened the Protestant Cause, and is the Mean intended in future Time for the Overthrow of Popish Tyranny, the Reason of this extraordinary Favour will be evident: Yet, however this may prove, we are assured, that as God is Just, and Wise, and Good, so in this, as well as every other Act of Providence, there is a strict Conformity to these Attributes; which, however Things may be concealed at present, will be manifest in Times yet to come.

II. I proceed to my Second Observation, That the Manner of the Divine Action, in the Affair before us, is not so much by the astonishing Interposition of miraculous Power, as by a secret Influence on the Wills of Men; by an Infatuation of Counsels;—by a Disappointment of Devices; and, as it is expressed in the Text, by *making the Diviners mad*.

Hitherto I have treated of Providence, either as to its Nature in the general, or the Objects about which it is conversant. I am now to consider the Manner of its Operation.

And

S E R M O N XI. 325

And here we may take Notice, that, on some Occasions, it displays itself in a *miraculous* Way; that is, either by suspending those Laws according to which the Course of natural Things is carried on, or else by counteracting them.

As Experience hath shewn, that like Causes produce like Effects according to the common Order of Nature, from hence we are led to expect the same under similar Circumstances: And yet, in certain Cases, it hath proved otherwise; Appearances have been not only different, but contrary: And these are properly termed *miraculous*.

The Truth is, the Effect of the common Laws of Nature is the Work of God operating in an ordinary Way; and the Consideration of this is sufficient to establish a general Providence: But it is the Misfortune of Mankind, that they are apt to overlook what happens every Day. They want therefore to be awakened: And, in some Instances, God hath been pleased to remind them of his Superintendency by unsettling that Establishment, which nothing but a Divine Influence can interrupt.

There have been other, and still higher, Reasons for this Purpose. As often as he

326 S E R M O N XI.

hath chosen to instruct Mankind by extraordinary Messengers, he hath seen fit to support the Authority he gave them; and this by exerting in their Favour Powers, which must distinguish them as his proper Messengers. No other sufficient Proof can be produced for this Purpose; and the producing this must, with every reasonable Man, prevail: For, though Facts, considered merely as such, prove nothing but their own Existence; yet whilst they carry our Thoughts on to the proper Cause of them, and the Ends designed by them, they cannot but have a farther Effect; and must therefore be understood as a Divine Testimony given to a Divine Authority.

Yet still, though the Power of working Miracles be essential to God, he never exerts it without sufficient Cause; and that only is sufficient, where the End cannot be properly obtained without it. God never acts in vain; as he must be supposed to do, if Ends, as properly attainable in a natural Way, be prosecuted by Means supernatural.

I am from hence led directly to the Point which the present Head proposes; under which, excluding the Exercise of a Power properly miraculous, I am to consider the
Supreme

S E R M O N XI. 327

Supreme Being as producing Events which neither the Wisdom nor Power of Man could produce : Yet, as it pleases him, in such Cases, not to counteract natural Causes, but to direct them, we do not say, that Miracle is here concerned : And it is this which founds the Distinction between a Providence strictly *miraculous*, and that which is only *extraordinary*.

The Events, this way produced, are great and important, and worthy of a Divine Interposition. Such indeed is, in some sort, every thing in which Providence is concerned : For this we may be assured of, that God never acts beneath himself. Yet, as some Events are of a more extensive Concern, and not to be produced in an ordinary Way, these we must conceive as Subjects of God's special Care : They not only deserve, but need it.

Thus far then are we got upon this Point, that a Providence *extraordinary*, counteracting none of the Laws of Nature, only directs the Operation either of established Laws, or of those Agents, which we commonly term *natural*.

If we consider this Direction of the former, it is easy to observe, that the greatest Events may be influenced this way, and from hence

328 S E R M O N XI.

be either forwarded or hindered : For every thing of that kind depending on a Concurrence of Circumstances, whatever shall influence these, must, in a great Degree, govern the Whole. So far even natural Providence is concerned ; and that which may be thought *ordinary* in one View, in another will become *extraordinary*.

But what I am principally to note here, relates to another Point ; *viz.* The Direction of those Agents which we commonly term *natural*. Now these, if properly such, have a self-moving Power within them ; the Determination of which may arise from a Variety of Causes, but especially from those secret Suggestions which sometimes turn Men from pursuing Points to which every visible Motive urges them : They are led to act in a particular Manner, we know not how ; and they themselves, if consulted, could as little account for such Determinations as we can : It is God who directs them, they themselves in the mean while insensible of the Direction.

See how this Matter is represented in the Text ! where, intimating the Means by which the Restoration of the *Jews* was to be brought about, the Prophet thus explains the Matter ; *That frustrateth the Tokens of Liars, and maketh Diviners*

S E R M O N XI. 329

Diviners mad; that turneth wise Men backward, and maketh their Knowledge foolish. These Words express an inward Influence of the Divine Being on the Minds of Men, for the Accomplishment of his own great Purposes; the Disappointment of Devices by the very Projectors themselves;---the Madness of Enthusiasm subverting what it most passionately desires to support; and the Infatuation of wise Men, whose Counsels point the very contrary Way to what they are designed,---or who at least aim at an End, by Means utterly incapable of producing it. Thus is it that God governs the World, making Men the undesigning Instruments of his Will.

Nor can this appear either impossible or improbable to any one who reasons coolly on the Matter: For can we think, that *he*, who is the very Author of our Being, should be unable to act directly on our Minds? That *he*, who is every-where present, and *in whom we live, and move, and have our Being*, [*Acts xvii. 28.*] should find it difficult to guide and turn us as he pleases? Or is it unlikely, that one, who is both the Creator and Governor of the World, should exercise those Powers, which every inferior Governor doth, in a lower Degree?---I mean, the turning to the
Ends

330 S E R M O N XI.

Ends of his own wise Superintendency, the Wills, the Inclinations, and the very Passions, of his Subjects. In the Skill of doing this consists the very Art of Government: And it must appear strange, if we deny to the Supreme Governor, the doing that for the noblest Ends, which others do, and are justified in doing, for Purposes much less important.

But I am aware a Difficulty may here be started. How is it consistent with the Liberty of human Nature to act thus upon the Mind, and to create Determinations which the Will might not otherwise have made? I go no farther, because I would not be engaged on this intricate Point beyond what my present Subject leads to.

Now, if an absolute irresistible Impulse were here understood, to which nothing could be opposed, no Motives of any kind whatsoever, a Difficulty might be thought to arise: For, on this Foot, Man would move, not as he chose, but was impelled; and the Effect produced would not properly be owing to himself, but to the Being from whom he received the Impulse. But, in truth, the Case is otherwise: The Power supposed to be exerted, in this Case, doth not destroy the Will, but concur with it. It operates just in
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S E R M O N XI. 331

the same Way as natural or moral Motives are understood to do : It suggests Reasons ; and these have their Effects, as other Reasons likewise have, whether exhibited by the Mind itself, or presented by any foreign Causes.

Put the Case : One Man tempts another to pursue Ends, perhaps, improper : And he does it by proposing Motives which prove effectual ; because he to whom they are proposed, approves them. In consequence of these he acts : His Actions are his own : His Mind is free ; and he becomes accountable for the Choice. Suppose the Supreme Being acts, I will not say the same Thing, but in the same Manner ; for the real Ends of Providence are always just and noble. When God exerts himself on the Mind, it is always in the moral Way ; by setting Things in such a Light as prevails. The Mind in this Case, strictly speaking, determines itself ; and so long as its own Power of Determination is preserved, its Liberty must remain secure. Enough on a Point which I am rather forced to mention, than inclined to it.

The whole which hath been advanced on the present Head, is this ; That Miracles being out of the Question, as being concerned
only

332 S E R M O N XI.

only in those Cases which clearly require them, Providence exerts itself on extraordinary Occasions in extraordinary Ways; and brings its own Purposes to Effect, by bending the Wills of Men, and raising out of their Weakness or Passions the Monuments of its own Praise.

III. I am now, in the Third place, to apply what hath been noted on the foregoing Heads, to the Purpose of this Day's Solemnity.

We are now to commemorate the Restoration of the *English* Government, after it had undergone a violent and total Dissolution; for *total* we may call it, when the whole Frame itself was altered, and both the legislative and executive Powers were placed in Hands unknown to the Constitution.

A Dissolution this, to all Appearance, irreparable. The Persons who had effected it, were so confident, that they ventured on a Measure at which the whole World was astonished: They brought their own King to a Trial before a Tribunal even of his own Subjects; they condemned him, not by any Law then subsisting, but by that of their own absolute Will; and then cruelly murdered him

S E R M O N XI. 333

him in open Day,—in the Face of the whole Kingdom; and, I may add, against the Inclinations of the far greatest Part of it.

Proud of this Success, they advanced still farther; and having overthrown the regal Government, they removed from their Seats the upper House of Parliament,----judging very rightly, that those who derived their hereditary Honours from the Crown, might be disposed (as indeed most of them were) to retrieve past Errors,—and, in consequence, to endeavour the Resettlement of what they had formerly contributed to overthrow. Yet so absolute was their Power, that this likewise was quietly submitted to.

Attempts indeed were made by some, who were Friends to the antient Establishment, to restore Matters: But these were every-where unsuccessful; and so far from weakening the new-erected Government, that they served only to confirm it.

When they were in this Height of their Glory, and least suspicious of Danger, *their Power* (I mean, Power, as lodged in them) was overthrown at once: Even their own Servant, whom they had employed as the Instrument of their Tyranny, subdued them; the wise and just Providence of God punish-
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334 S E R M O N XI.

ing their Insolence in a remarkable Manner by means of that very Person, by whose Assistance they had before destroyed their King.

Yet, what did all this avail toward the Restoration of our antient Government? The Constitution was in as bad a State as before. The Government indeed changed Hands: But there was little other Difference in the Case than this; That whereas the *Parliament* had, before this, created and ruled their *General*, the *General* now created and ruled the *Parliament*. The Government was exercised in a Way vastly different from that which the Constitution pointed out; and being entirely influenced by one, who had Power to support him, and great Policy to direct that Power, there was no Prospect that Things would ever settle on their antient Foundations.

It is true, indeed, the *Protector* had his Enemies; — some of them amongst those who had formerly assisted to raise him: But even these he managed either by Craft or Force; and, as the *Noble Historian* tells us, “He was obeyed at home, and revered abroad, as much as any legal Prince had ever been.”

When this great Genius at length failed,
Matters

S E R M O N XI. 335

Matters could not be kept in the same State, and under the same Forms: The new *Protector*, unequal to his Work, was easily removed; and the Reins of Government were now held by other Hands: The Old Parliament again resumed its Place; and little Hope of a Restoration appeared.

But now Providence, which had before ordered Matters in a Way less observable, began to display itself. Nothing was carried on with Steadiness. Those very Persons, who had a great Hand in bringing about the former fatal Change, mad with the Remembrance of their antient Glory, grew vain and insolent: They provoked a Power they were now unable to manage, and so fell themselves a Sacrifice to their Folly: The Parliament was broke, and a military Government erected on its Ruins.

Yet, still, what sort of Good did all this promise? In every such Change of the Scene, instead of restoring the true *English* Constitution, they only deviated farther from it; and seemed to settle, not in the old Way, but under the Dominion of one, or of a few, who having greater Credit, or superior Abilities, were most likely to subdue the rest.

But

336 S E R M O N XI.

But here Providence appeared in a most distinguishing Manner. When all was involved in Confusion, a Northern General, from whom such a Step was not then expected, gave a new Turn to Things: Those whom he had ruled for several Years with a most heavy Hand, were reconciled to him, and concurred with him in his Views: The Power he was going to oppose, and which might easily have crushed him, forbore till it was too late to act; and, when going to exert itself, was at once dissolved, contrary to all human Expectations: The greatest Part of the Kingdom, even those who had been most active in overthrowing our Constitution, expressed an ardent Desire of restoring it: The Old Parliament, which had been twice dismissed, and twice restored, consented at length to dissolve itself: The Convention, summoned upon this Dissolution, grown weary of our long Miseries, returned to their Senses, and united, as One Man, to end them: An Opposition projected was happily disappointed; and, in consequence, the Government, which had been gradually weakened, and then entirely ruined, was at once restored to all its antient Vigour and Glory.

Happy would it have been if, duly sensible
of

S E R M O N XI. 337

of this Blessing, Men had shewn themselves worthy of it. But it proved quite otherwise. Many of the same Errors, which had been committed before the Civil War broke out, were again repeated; and within the Compass of less than Thirty Years, we ran great Hazard either of falling under a popish and absolute Government, or else, by endeavouring to throw it off improperly, of falling back into the very same State, from which we were, as on this Day, delivered. But here likewise Providence interposed; and, without the Effusion of Blood, perfected a Revolution which resettled, and in some sort improved, our antient Constitution. May we always act in such a manner as no more to need either a Restoration or Revolution!

IV. I am now, under my last Head, to offer such Matters of Instruction or Caution, as do naturally arise from the foregoing Discourse. And,

I. Let us consider all such Events, as have been hitherto described, in a religious View; ----I mean, not barely as produced by the Operation of the Supreme Being, but likewise as intended for certain Ends; and therefore as carrying with them some peculiar Obligations to Duty.

338 SERMON XI.

The State of our Mind, upon the Appearance of something extraordinary, will be *Surprise*: And if the Event be highly interesting, it will be either *Joy* or *Grief*, as it proves either agreeable or otherwise. Here Men are too apt to stop,---neither enquiring after the proper Cause of this Appearance, nor pursuing it into its just Consequences. But such a Behaviour is unsuitable to our Circumstances, whether as religious or reasonable Creatures. In the former respect our Thoughts will be naturally turned to God, and the Event considered as a gracious and merciful Admonition; in the latter, Curiosity, methinks, should lead us to trace this Matter both in its Principle and its Conclusions; and this, if done properly, must of course bring us to Religion.

But, if some are careless, and receive Blessings without reflecting on their Author, others may be found of a Temper still more culpable. These not only overlook Religion, but explode it; and ascribe such Matters, as we have now in View, either to Chance, or to Nature.

Their Absurdity must appear from hence, that Chance, being no Cause, can produce nothing; and what they call Nature, is the very Power of God exercised in the Support
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S E R M O N XI. 339

and Direction of the World. If this be true, then the very Method whereby they would exclude Religion, when rightly understood, confirms it.

From this general Reflection let us pass on to others of a more particular Nature.

2. To this purpose let us, Secondly, esteem the Constitution of this Kingdom as in some sense *sacred*; Providence having stamped this Character upon it by the Restoration, which we now commemorate.

If we consider this Constitution in itself, it is fitted to support all that Authority which the Nature of Government requires, and all that Liberty which it is the End and Design of it to maintain: For absolute Government, exercised by arbitrary Will, and against the very Ends of its Institution (however the Words may sound), is not properly Government.

A Constitution of the kind I have now mentioned, because it is beneficial to Subjects, we might suppose would be proportionably the Care of Providence; at least till Men should render themselves unworthy of it, and become so degenerate as to become incapable of Reformation. Bad as they have been, this hath not yet proved our Case: Even

340 SERMON XI.

though the Corruptions, prevailing in a former Age, dissolved this Constitution, yet Providence hath restored it to us; and, by this, hath taught Men how precious that ought to be in our Sight, which was so valuable even in the Sight of God.

But, perhaps, it will be said, "To what were we restored as on this Day? Was it to our Constitution?" --- That perhaps may be questioned: For, though the Constitution, which prevailed before the Civil War, was indeed restored, yet that which we enjoy at present, is of a very different Kind: We feel it; and if those, who lived in former Ages, were to revive, they must confess it likewise.

Yet the real Difference lies not so much in the Constitution itself, as in the Administration. The Government was in reality the same under both Periods:---A Government to be exercised over free Subjects. It was so understood by wise Men, even long before the Civil War began: And what hath been since done, should be considered by us rather as an Explanation of what our Constitution in truth implied, than as properly a Correction of it. This at least must be allowed; That the main Plan of it is still the same; and

S E R M O N XI. 341

and if other good Things have been since built on it, the Foundation, on which they have been raised, was worth restoring.

3. Let us take care not to tempt Providence, by behaving in such a manner, as to make another Restoration necessary.

I have had Occasion to observe already, that there have been few Examples of a Government restored after a total Dissolution. This must be the Work, not of Man, but God; who, though capable of doing it in any Case, yet will do it in none without the greatest and strongest Reasons. We should therefore consider when we are well; and learn to enjoy the Advantages we possess: For, if we once throw them away, they may be placed beyond our Reach for ever.

There are some indeed of a very particular Cast, who, not content with the present State of Things, are even now wishing for a *Restoration*: But a *Restoration* of what? Not of the true *English* Constitution; for that we enjoy in its full Force. What therefore do they wish to see restored?—Is it that kind of Administration which our Forefathers were not able to bear?—Is it that Dominion of Prerogative over Law, which violated the real Constitution most essentially, and left Men

342 S E R M O N XI.

nothing they could properly call their own? —Is it the Advancement of a *popish* Prince over a *protestant* People, who, possessed of every arbitrary Notion, will reckon us not as his Subjects, but his Slaves? —Is it the setting up Popery once more? for that was heretofore the established Religion of this Kingdom. If all, or any, of these be meant, *such a Restoration* must be Destruction; and if we do not oppose this Destruction, we deserve it; if such Persons cannot enjoy themselves under the present Government, let them remove from it: It will be some sort of Kindness not to disquiet others with their Wishes: We can be happy enough without them.

I have One Exhortation more to offer; and that is, Let us express our Thankfulness for the Blessing, as on this Day conferred, by endeavouring to preserve inviolate every Part of our Constitution; for we must be insensible of the Advantages arising from it, if we do not truly value it; and we cannot truly value, without endeavouring to support it.

As to the Ecclesiastical Part (for that likewise is interwoven with the Civil), it is an Establishment of Christianity as reformed from the Errors and Corruptions of Popery; but

S E R M O N XI. 343

but such an Establishment withal as tolerates those who may think we have not reformed enough ; and therefore cannot, in all Points, join us. Under this View we may hope, that whilst the more favoured Professors, claiming only their own Right, shew all Christian Regard to those who differ from them, those others likewise will keep within proper Bounds, and not invade that very Constitution by which their own Toleration is supported.

In reference to our Civil Constitution, it is a Government by King, Lords, and Commons : Each hath its particular Rights ; and from the proper Adjustment of these, all that Power arises, which is necessary to promote the Happiness of the Subject,—and all that Liberty, which can consist with the proper Exercise of Power.

It was the Misfortune of former Times, that a due Balance between these Parts of our Civil Constitution was not always preserved. The Power of the Prince was apt to be extended too far : And so it happened, that by the Struggle to reduce it, those Miseries arose from which we were, as on this Day, delivered.

The Case is now otherwise : We are happily

344 S E R M O N XI.

pily governed by a King, who is, in the strictest Sense of the Word, a *Patriot*; and not less concerned to secure *our* Happiness, than his own. We are safe therefore as to all Incroachments from that Quarter: And whilst Regal Orders are not advanced into Laws, nor Laws themselves voided by Regal Dispensations, one might hope every Man should be so sensible of our present Circumstances, as to be quiet at least. But an evil Spirit hath gone forth. I do not know whether greater Freedoms are not now daily taken with the Government, than were ventured on when the Civil War first began. Forgive me, if I cannot forbear to call this *intolerable*: And though it becomes not one of my Profession to prescribe to his Civil Superiors, or to direct how they ought to behave in such a Case, yet it will not be thought foreign to my Character to say; Religion condemns such a Behaviour;—common Sense condemns it;—and those who give themselves this Liberty, must be entirely Strangers to both.—I return; for I chuse not to dwell on so melancholy a Subject,—on this Day especially, when we are called upon rather to rejoice in the Happiness we possess, than to disquiet ourselves even with the Fears of losing it.

Upon

S E R M O N XI. 345

Upon the whole; then, and to put an End to this Discourse : Let us consider ourselves as Christians, as *Englishmen*, and as Freemen. In the First respect, we are under a Divine Government, the Rules of which enforce on us an Obedience to Human : As *Englishmen*, we are Subjects at least ; for I do not apprehend it is by any one maintained, that we are exempt from all kinds of Civil Restraint : And, as Freemen, we have certain Rights belonging to us ; all which, under the present Administration, are secure. If, to the Obligations resulting from these, we give a proper Attention, we shall testify our Gratitude for the past, and our Sense of the present ; and (which is more) ensure the Divine Protection for the future,

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SERMON XII.

Reasons why God delays the Punishments of Wicked Men.

2 PET. 3. 8, 9.

*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing,
That One Day is with the Lord as a Thousand Years, and a Thousand Years as One Day.*

*The Lord is not slack concerning his Promise
(as some Men count Slackness),---but is long
suffering to us-ward;---not willing that any
should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.*

ONE main Article, in the Preaching of the Apostles, was this; That by standing out against the Calls and Invitations of Grace, Men would provoke the Divine

348 S E R M O N XII.

vine Vengeance, and draw down Judgments too heavy to be born :---That a just and good God would certainly make a suitable Distinction between the Righteous and the Sinner ; and at least in the next Life (which could not be far off) reward or punish Men in proportion either to their Obedience or their Crimes. These are the Words, before *spoken by the holy Prophets*, and since by the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour, which *St. Peter* recommends to the Remembrance of those Christians to whom he wrote.

A Consideration so important, one might be apt to think, must needs make a deep Impression. But, it seems, *Scoffers were to arise in the latter Days* ; and, probably, were already arisen when our Apostle wrote this Epistle : Men, in their own Conceits at least, of more than ordinary Reach,---and not to be imposed upon by distant and groundless Terrors : They had been told indeed of impending Judgments ; of the Anger of God, and of Vengeance to come : But for all this, Nature (as far as they could see) went on in an even, regular, Course : The Virtuous and the Vicious shared alike the common Blessings and Misfortunes of Life ; nor could any thing be observed in the Conduct of Providence (if

S E R M O N XII. 349

a Providence there were) which gave any Intimation of these Terrors. *Where, say they, is the Promise of his Coming? For, since the Fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation.*

It is somewhat surprizing, that Men who pretended to a greater Reach than ordinary, should argue in so weak a Manner; and conclude, that no future Punishment was to be expected, from that very Argument which certainly proves it. If there be a God (as it is demonstrable there is), he must of necessity be just and wise: And if these Perfections do of necessity belong to his Nature, it is impossible he should treat Men otherwise than agreeably to these Perfections: And therefore, if his Justice be not manifested in the present Punishment of wicked Men, it is certain, that another State awaits them, and a Judgment worthy of God.

But these bold Arguers have not only failed in their Manner of Reasoning, but have erred as to the very Principle from which they argued. *Where, say they, is the Promise of his Coming? For, since the Fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation.* Were they then such Strangers to the History of the World? Had they never
heard

350 S E R M O N XII.

heard any thing of a general Flood?—of the Destruction of *Sodom*? or of the Captivity of the *Israelites*? Had they never once enquired into these Matters? How then durst they so positively assert, that *all things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation*?

The Truth of the Case is; God doth not interpose, in a miraculous Manner, upon every Instance of Sin: As he hath made Men Free-agents, so he doth not interrupt the Use of this Liberty, by breaking in upon the common Order of Causes and Effects. Hence Nature goes on, for the most part, in one uniform Course; and exemplary Punishments are reserved only for extraordinary Occasions. Yet still God hath not left himself without Witness: Many Predictions of his Prophets have been already confirmed by Fact: The Old World was destroyed by a Miracle; and *Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth to us for Examples, having suffered the Vengeance of eternal Fire.*

Instances of this kind, it must be confessed, are rare; however those few which have been afforded us, are enough to alarm the Sinner. Men should not flatter themselves, that their Crimes are forgotten, because they are yet unpunished;—but rather dread the Delays
of

S E R M O N XII. 351

of Vengeance. Though Mercy spares them for the present, yet this very Mercy, if slighted, will encrease their future Ruin.

There may be many wise Reasons assigned for this Conduct of Providence; Reasons sufficient to abate the Triumphs of the Infidel, and the Confidence of the Presumptuous; especially when it shall appear, that the Reasons alledged do strongly conclude for the Certainty of future Punishment.

- I. It is remarked in the Text, That *God is long-suffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance.* Be this therefore the First Reason for delaying Vengeance on the Wicked; viz. That Men may be brought to a Sense of their Condition, and led to use those Methods, which may serve to avert God's Anger.
- II. Let it be observed, Secondly, That, in many Cases, ready Punishment cannot be inflicted on bad Men, without laying a considerable Share of it on the Good; and therefore God spares them for the present, that the Righteous may not be involved in the Calamities of the Wicked.
- III. The Agency of ill Men may be made use

352 S E R M O N XII.

use of in order to bring about many great and concerning Designs of Providence ; and, in particular, the Delays of Vengeance, on some ill Men, may serve for the Scourge and Chastisement of others. So far is their present Impunity from encouraging our Presumption, that it is really a very pressing Argument to the contrary.

IV. But, however this be, yet, Fourthly, it is much one, with respect to the Divine Being, *when* Punishment is inflicted on ill Men, if it be inflicted at all : *One Day is with him as a Thousand Years, and a Thousand Years as One Day.* Nor can the Sinner, if he reflects, take any great Satisfaction in thinking, that those Punishments are distant, which are yet *certain*.

V. To which we may add, Lastly, That the present Delays of Vengeance, if they do not work their proper Effects, and lead Men to that Repentance they were intended to produce, will but heighten and aggravate their Ruin. By continuing in their Sins, notwithstanding these Opportunities of Grace, they *treasure up to themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God.*

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The Supreme Being is infinitely tender and merciful ; and not only ready to receive us to Favour whenever we return to Him, but unwilling to execute upon us the very Judgments which we invite : He threatens us with this Design, that we may avoid the Miseries which he threatens ; and delays that Vengeance from which he desires we should escape.

To this purpose *Noah* was commissioned to be a Preacher of Righteousness to the antient World ; and though the Sins of Men had so far prevailed, *that it repented the Lord that he had created Man*, yet still their Destruction was deferred for an Hundred and Twenty Years more. Thus did the Forbearance of God exceed Mens Provocations, ---and his Mercy triumph over Justice.

To the same purpose there was a Succession of Prophets vouchsafed to the *Israelites*. The just Deserts of their Corruption and Apostacy were not immediately allotted them: The merciful God, whom they had provoked so highly by their Crimes, was more tender to them than they were to themselves : He delayed the Vengeance he had so often threatened, and they invited ; and waited

354 S E R M O N XII.

long to receive those Persons to Pardon, whom he was unwilling to punish; till, at last, when they became utterly irreclaimable, and incapable of being wrought on in a gentler Way, he *gave them up into the Hands of their Enemies, and made those who hated them, to be Rulers over them.*

Yet still, he did not utterly abandon this People, once so highly favoured by him: He punished them, not to destroy, but to reform them; and when this great End was gained, he brought them back to their own Country, and restored them, in some measure, to that Happiness from which they had fallen: And when afterwards they stood out against the most amazing Instance of Goodness,—and had put to death the *Messiah*, the Son of God, — though their Sins were so astonishing, yet God's Mercy was proportionable: They were not immediately pursued with Vengeance: The Gospel of Repentance and Pardon was first published to them: They were earnestly invited to accept Forgiveness, and to divert the Storm which was gathering over them;—nay, perverse and obstinate as they proved on this Occasion, and hardened against the Sense of present Favour, and of future Terror, yet God bare with them for
Forty

S E R M O N XII. 355

Forty Years more. So slow was he to execute that Sentence, which they had imprecated on themselves,—*His Blood be on us, and on our Children.*

It appears by this Series of remarkable Providences with which the Sacred Writings furnish us (and more Instances might be produced from thence, did either the Subject require it, or would the Time permit), that *God is slow to Anger, and plenteous in Mercy*; and that he spares the Sinner, not because he overlooks his Crimes, but is desirous he should reform them.

But perhaps we may bring the Matter more home to ourselves; and argue the Point in such a Manner, as may, at the same time, convince the Reason, and influence the Passions; in *such*, as may urge us to Gratitude for what is past, and alarm us with the Fears of what is yet to come. Every considering Man must be conscious to himself of a vast Number of Imperfections: If he hath any Sense, any Feeling left of what is Right and Wrong, he cannot but look back with Regret on many (I will not say barely Indiscretions,---but) Crimes of a more heinous Nature;----on many Actions which are a Reproach to Reason, and a Provocation to God.

356 S E R M O N XII.

And yet God hath spared us, and given us this Opportunity of once more adoring his Goodness. Should Justice be immediately executed, who could abide God's Wrath? The World would be soon unpeopled; and Objections against Providence would indeed be cut off, because there would be none left to object against it. But *God knoweth whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but Dust*: He makes Allowances for the Infirmities of our Nature; and is not less inclined to forgive the Penitent, than to punish the Obstinate.

Nay, to advance a Step farther, and to draw an Argument from the Reason of Things; The very Nature of Mercy, if that Attribute belongs to God (as we are sure it does), requires such a Conduct as we are defending: It consists in abating of the rigorous Demands of Justice, and in dealing with Offenders, rather in proportion to his own Tenderneſs, than their Deserts. This supposes, that Punishment is not to be immediately executed; that weak and frail Men shall have some Time allotted them to correct their Errors, and to prepare themselves to meet their God.

If this then be the Case, and Sinners are permitted to remain unpunished, that they
may

S E R M O N XII. 357

may have Opportunities for Repentance, how perversely do they abuse God's Favours, by obstinately continuing in their Sins? And what heavy Wrath must hereafter be expected, when Justice shall overtake those Persons whom Mercy could not save?

It happens indeed sometimes, that Men become notoriously profligate and abandoned; that they shake off all Sense of Virtue; and reduce themselves to such a State, as deprives us of all rational Hope either of their Repentance or Forgiveness. Persons so ripe for Punishment, may be thought not barely to deserve, but to demand it: And however the Delays of Vengeance may be, expedient in the general, yet it may be presumed, that it is no easy Matter to account for the Divine Forbearance in this Case.

I conceive, however, that this Difficulty (if a Difficulty it be) will be cleared up by considering what was proposed under the

Second general Head; *viz.* That, in many Cases, ready Punishments cannot be inflicted on bad Men without laying a considerable Share of it on the Good; and therefore God spares them for the present, that the Righteous may not be involved in the Calamities of the Wicked.

358 S E R M O N XII.

The State of the World requires that the Concerns of different Men should be blended together ; that they should be jointly either fortunate or calamitous ; and enjoy or suffer the Goods or Evils of Life in common. Thus, for wise Purposes no doubt, there is implanted a strong Principle of Tenderneſs between Parents and their Children. From whence it follows, that, generally ſpeaking, they muſt partake in each other's Joys or Sorrows ; --- and that the one cannot be happy or miſerable, without affecting, in a good meaſure, the other too. The Punishments therefore which are inflicted on either, will touch, in ſome proportion, the oppoſite Relation ; and it is ſcarce poſſible to do Juſtice to the one, without laying ſomewhat of Hardſhip on the other.

Befide theſe natural Relations and Ties, there are others which ariſe from Society, and a mutual Dependence in civil Life. The Interests of different Men will be found to be ſo interwoven together, that they cannot, in an ordinary Way, be ſeparated ; and Good and Bad having often one common Concern in the Affairs of Life, almoſt any Methods which would puniſh ſome, would equally diſtreſs others,

Nay,

S E R M O N XII. 359

Nay, farther, the very natural State of the World is such, that unless God should, in an extraordinary and miraculous Manner, interpose between Men (and we are not surely to expect Miracles in favour of the Righteous, as often as Punishments are due to the Wicked), it is unavoidable but the Good and Bad must be generally prosperous or calamitous together; only making Allowances for what is the natural Result of Virtue or Vice.

Thus, for Instance: The Blessing of a fruitful, or the Curse of an unfruitful, Season; the Influences of a good or bad Air, and the like, must be common; and *the Sun must arise, and the Rain descend, alike on the Righteous and the Wicked.* It is plain then, that ordinarily bad Men cannot be punished, but the Innocent must in proportion suffer: And therefore we may reasonably presume, that God spares the Sinner for a time, out of Tenderneſs and Compaſſion to the Righteous themselves.

The greater Reason is there to build the Proceedings of Providence, in ſome Inſtances, on ſuch a Principle, not only becauſe this Life is rather a State of Trial than Retribution; ---but alſo, becauſe in the next World all theſe Ties and Relations between Men

360 S E R M O N XII.

shall cease ; all their Concerns and Interests shall be separate and personal ; and *then*, whatever Punishments shall be laid on the Wicked, they will be sustained by *them* alone ; the Righteous all the while adoring the Mercy and Justice of God in so nicely appointing the Rewards or Punishments of Men's Actions.

But we need not build the present Point on Probability or Conjecture, since the Sacred Writings give us abundant Authority for arguing in the present Manner. Thus, when God was pleased to reveal to *Abraham* his severe Intentions against *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, the good Man pleaded for an Abatement of that Severity towards the Wicked, because it would involve the Good also in the common Destruction ; Upon which it is recorded, that God so far approved of *Abraham's* Plea on this Occasion, as to declare, that if there were but Ten Righteous only within those Cities, He would, in regard to them, stay his Hand ; and, for the Sake of their Interests, delay his Vengeance on all the numerous Wicked.

Again, when he would represent in the strongest Manner the Firmness of his Decree to punish the idolatrous *Israelites*, he declared,
That

S E R M O N XII. 361

That though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in the Land, they should deliver but their own Souls by their Righteousness [Ezek. xiv. 14.]

This Representation loses all its Force and Strength, unless it be supposed, that, generally speaking, God spares the Bad for the sake of, and in Compassion to, the Good. But to put the Point out of all Dispute: Our Blessed Saviour hath settled this Matter in the well-known Parable of the Tares and Wheat; in which he gives this Direction; That forasmuch as there is no plucking up the Tares without injuring the Wheat (the Roots of both being intermixed), they should therefore both grow together till the Harvest.

But the Objection or Difficulty we have been considering, may perhaps be pressed farther; and it may be alledged, that notwithstanding the common Interests of good and bad Men, in many Instances, yet, upon the whole, much more Mischief arises from the Impunity, than could possibly arise from the Punishments of some wicked Men; their ungoverned Appetites ever disposing them to Injustice and Oppression, and to support them by the Misfortunes and Calamities of others. This Difficulty will be removed by considering,

Thirdly,

362 S E R M O N XII.

Thirdly, That there may be several Ends promoted by the present Impunity of bad Men ; and, in particular, that they are, by this means, employed for the Scourge and Chastisement of others. This Conduct therefore is so far from giving Encouragement to Confidence and Presumption, that it is really a very pressing Argument to the contrary.

The Objection, as it is now pointed, relates only to the Case of those whose Appetites are prodigiously extravagant ; and who are from thence pushed on to injurious and oppressive Practices. With respect to such we may observe, that they, being Friends only to themselves, are equally Enemies to all others, whether good or bad ; and therefore are as much disposed to bring deserved Punishments on the Wicked, as to injure and oppress the Righteous : For, being wholly under the Dominion of their Appetites, they will be led only which Way these Desires call. Now One Part of the Providence of God consists in this ; *viz.* That he directs the Wills of Men ; and though he offers no Violence to their Natures, yet, by a secret Influence, he leads them on to the Accomplishment of his own just Purposes. Thus, as to the present Case : If the
prosperous

S E R M O N XII. 363

prosperous Wicked are not of themselves led to invade and oppress other wicked Men (as no doubt they often are), yet it may fairly be supposed, that God will interest himself on such Occasions ; and aim their Designs (where they may most usefully be executed) against others as bad, or worse than themselves.

We may be justified in this Way of thinking, by numerous Accounts in sacred and profane Histories ; from which it will appear, that successful Sinners have often proved the Executioners of God's Wrath ; and that the less wicked have been employed to chastise the greater.

Those Oppressors of Mankind, the Heroes of the antient World, generally prevailed most against those who merited most to suffer ; ---against those who were enervated by Debaucheries, or broken by civil Dissentions ;—and little deserved to enjoy the Liberties which they lost.

It would be endless to prosecute this Observation through that Variety of Instances with which we are supplied in antient profane History : I shall therefore chuse rather to confirm this Point from the Sacred Writings.

Every-

364 S E R M O N XII.

Every-one must have observed how the wicked Neighbours of the *Israelites* proved as Thorns in their Sides : And as they were preserved for that very Purpose, so they took Advantage of every Defection of that People from God. The Scripture says, that when they fell off into Idolatry, they were delivered into the Hands of these Enemies ; and so became miserable Slaves to that very People they chose to imitate.

The Defection of the Ten Tribes, and the Success of *Jeroboam* in that Affair, was a just Punishment for the Fierceness and Tyranny of that Prince from whom they revolted : And as this Division and Separation in the *Jewish* State put an End to all its Greatness, so did it justly chastise the Abuse of it.

Nebuchadnezzar was raised up by God, that he might be employed to pluck up, to root out, and to destroy. And accordingly, though he was Vain, Ambitious, and Cruel, yet he succeeded in his Enterprizes ; and, in particular, he executed on the *Jews* that Wrath, of which they had received so many fruitless Warnings. However, though he had been employed for the Punishment of others, yet he was not entirely overlooked himself : When he had succeeded so far as to accomplish

S E R M O N XII. 365

plish all his Greatness, he was checked in his Enjoyment of it : He fell into a Distraction, which sunk him to a Level with the Beasts which perish.

This Instance leads me on to observe farther, that however ill Men may be permitted to thrive for the present, that they may be employed as Instruments in the Hand of Providence to punish more heinous Sinners, yet this will not privilege them from Punishments themselves. If no remarkable Vengeance from Heaven overtake them, yet they are often prosecuted in an ordinary Way : And when they have executed these just Designs which were in View, they in their Turn become the Subjects of Wrath, and are corrected by other Instruments of Vengeance. But whether this be soon or late, let us consider,

Fourthly, That it is much one to the Divine Being *when* Punishment is inflicted on ill Men, if it be inflicted at all. *One Day is with him as a Thousand Years, and a Thousand Years as One Day.* Nor can the Sinner, if he reflects, take any great Satisfaction in thinking, that those Punishments are distant, which are yet certain.

It

366 S E R M O N XII.

It might perhaps be insisted on to this Purpose; that with respect to God, there is no Succession of Time; and that *past, present, and future*, are all one: That *sooner or later* makes no Difference in his Actions; and, consequently, that his Justice is not concerned whether Men be punished now or hereafter.

I will not, however, enlarge on a Notion, which may be disputed by some, and can scarce be clearly explained to others: Which is too subtle to be easily apprehended;—and, if it were so, is yet more apt to silence than to convince Men. I presume, we may account for those Expressions of the Apostle [*One Day is with God as a Thousand Years*] on another Foot, and apply them to our present Purpose with more Advantage.

Let us consider then, that God is eternal; and that there is no Proportion between Time and Eternity. The greatest finite Number will bear no Comparison with that which is infinite; and therefore to a Being which is *infinite*, all Finites having much the same Relation; the Difference between them must be esteemed as nothing.

This Account will be illustrated by considering, that Portions of Time are accounted
great

S E R M O N XII. 367

great or small only with respect to the whole Duration of that Being they are referred to. A Year, which is now reckoned a very considerable Time with relation to our short Existence, was yet of small Account in the Existence of the antient Patriarchs; and were our Life to be determined by a few Hours (as that of some other Animals possibly may), even a Minute would be no inconsiderable Part of our Duration.

It appears from hence, that *long* or *short*, with respect to Time, is only to be reckoned by considering the Duration of that Being it is applied to; and, consequently, God being eternal, *long* or *short* will be to *him* the same.

Farther: With respect to Man, we do maintain, that it is really much the same whether Punishments be soon or late; since whatever is certainly future should be reckoned upon as present; and the Miseries threatened will not be less grievous, however they have been delayed by God, or disregarded by us. It is common indeed, in this Life, to give the greatest Attention to what is ready and present; because we suffer our Senses to get the better of us, and sink the Man in the Brute: But to a Being that par-
takes

368 SERMON XII.

takes of a reasoning Principle, and is by this means capable of looking forward,---future Things should appear as present, and Faith should supply the Room of Sight.

In Matters of Philosophy we correct the Errors of Sense by the Improvements of Reason: We judge of Things not merely as they appear to us at first,---but as they really are: And he, who, at this Time of Day, should determine concerning the Bigness of the heavenly Bodies barely by the Reports of Sense, would forfeit all Pretences to philosophical Improvement. That Person is no less absurd, who permits the Distance of future Vengeance to lessen it in his Mind; and does not form the same Notion of it, as tho' it were even now hanging over his Head, and ready to burst upon him. But, besides, that Punishment is not less grievous by being delayed,---nor consequently ought it to have a less Force upon our Minds, there is another Consideration behind; *viz.* That we are not intended to live only in this State: We have within us an immortal Principle, and are designed for an eternal Life. It would run me into too great a Length to attempt the Proof of this Point here: Supposing it therefore at present, all the Reflections which I
have

S E R M O N XII. 369

have before offered with relation to God, will equally conclude here : For if we are to live for ever, then *sooner* or *later* will be much the same ; since the greatest Time can bear no Proportion to a Duration which shall never end.

The Argument is still more pressing, if we add, that these Punishments (unless we reform) shall last for ever : This we are assured, in the Sacred Writings, by the Authority of that Being who cannot err : And if this be the Case, then it matters nothing when these Punishments shall commence : There is no such thing as long or short in Eternity ; and those Miseries will begin too soon, which shall never end.

This leads me to consider what I proposed under my

Last Head ; *viz.* That the present Delays of Vengeance, if they do not work their proper Effects, and bring Men to that Repentance they were intended to produce, will but heighten and aggravate their Ruin : By continuing in their Sins, notwithstanding these Opportunities of Grace, *they treasure up to themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath,*

370 S E R M O N XII.

Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God.

Men may be punished for their Sins either in this Life or the next, or in both. Now which Method soever God may in his infinite Wisdom see fit to take,---yet we are assured both from the Experience of Fact in some Instances, and the Reason of the Thing in all, that the Abuse of his Forbearance must be dearly accounted for.

Let us therefore consider what the Conduct of Providence hath been on several Occasions: And as I mentioned God's Dealing with the antient World in the Beginning of this Discourse, it will be proper to take a more particular Notice of it here. We are told, that *the Wickedness of Man was very great, and the Imaginations of his Heart were only evil continually*; yet still God allowed him an Hundred and Twenty Years for Repentance: In the mean time, he appointed Noah, a *Preacher of Righteousness*, to instruct Men in their Duty, and to threaten Vengeance for their Sins. But this Method not prevailing, and the corrupt World making (if possible) a farther Progress in Wickedness,---as God's Mercy had been abused, so his Justice

S E R M O N XII. 371

Justice was at length provoked ; nor could it be satisfied but by a general Destruction ; Eight Persons only surviving the Ruins of the World. When *Sodom* and *Gomorrab*, and the neighbouring Cities, had filled up the Measure of their Iniquities ;—had wearied out even Patience itself ; and instead of profiting by the Conversation of *Lot*, had *vexed*, by their abominable Deeds, *his righteous Soul* ; the Terrors of the Lord at length took hold of them : They suffered a Punishment as amazing as their Crimes ; and are therefore set forth to us as dreadful Examples to all the future World. When the *Children of Israel* had killed the *Prophets*, and *stoned those that were sent unto them* ; when they had long gone on to add Sin to Sin, and had completed all by crucifying the Son of God, the Divine Mercy was at length withdrawn : They were given up to the pernicious Cruelty both of their Enemies and themselves : That whole People was either destroyed or dispersed : Nor have almost 1700 Years been at all sufficient to repair that Destruction : They still (those of their Posterity that remain) wander about, uncertain and unfixed, bearing on them the visible Marks of their Forefathers Crimes.

372 S E R M O N XII.

Other Instances to the same Purpose might be alledged ; but perhaps it will be of more Consequence to enquire into the Reason and Ground of this Proceeding ; and to shew, that, as it is fitting and proper with respect to God, so it highly becomes us to reckon upon it, that we may not at last plunge ourselves into those Miseries we cannot bear. It hath been remarked before, that God's Mercy and Forbearance was intended to lead Men to Repentance : By continuing therefore in their Sins, they not only defeat the Mercy of God of its intended Purpose, but, in like manner, by repeating their Crimes, they must repeat their Provocations too. By this means the Grace of God towards them must of course gradually lessen ; the Day of Wrath make nearer Approaches, and the Increase of their Sins must aggravate their Punishments. This is as certain, as it is, that God is just and righteous ; and will, one time or other, reward every Man according to his Works. And when this happens, whether it be in this World or the next, our Condition will be without Comfort : We shall accuse and condemn ourselves, unable to bear the Sense either of our Misery or our Folly.

What hath been said on this Point, is not
so

S E R M O N XII. 373

so much intended to satisfy a malicious Objection against either the Wisdom of Providence, or the Certainty of future Vengeance (however some Parts of this Discourse may be serviceable to that Purpose),---as to work in our Minds a more quick and lively Sense of the Danger which we run by a sinful Course. It is too true, even amongst those who profess to believe these Terrors of the Lord, that because *Sentence against an evil Work is not executed speedily, therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do Evil.* But let us look to ourselves; and reflecting on God's past Judgments, from thence conclude the future. The little empty Diversions of Life may amuse us for a while; but they will end in a little time; and then nothing will remain but to receive our Reward, or to satisfy for our Crimes. We know not indeed how *soon*, or how *late*, this may happen: But this we are sure of, that *God is not slack concerning [either] his Promises, [or his Threats] as some Men count Slackness.* *The Day of the Lord hasteneth as a Thief in the Night; and blessed are all they who are ready to meet him at his Coming.*

1911-12-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33-34-35-36-37-38-39-40-41-42-43-44-45-46-47-48-49-50-51-52-53-54-55-56-57-58-59-60-61-62-63-64-65-66-67-68-69-70-71-72-73-74-75-76-77-78-79-80-81-82-83-84-85-86-87-88-89-90-91-92-93-94-95-96-97-98-99-100-101-102-103-104-105-106-107-108-109-110-111-112-113-114-115-116-117-118-119-120-121-122-123-124-125-126-127-128-129-130-131-132-133-134-135-136-137-138-139-140-141-142-143-144-145-146-147-148-149-150-151-152-153-154-155-156-157-158-159-160-161-162-163-164-165-166-167-168-169-170-171-172-173-174-175-176-177-178-179-180-181-182-183-184-185-186-187-188-189-190-191-192-193-194-195-196-197-198-199-200-201-202-203-204-205-206-207-208-209-210-211-212-213-214-215-216-217-218-219-220-221-222-223-224-225-226-227-228-229-230-231-232-233-234-235-236-237-238-239-240-241-242-243-244-245-246-247-248-249-250-251-252-253-254-255-256-257-258-259-260-261-262-263-264-265-266-267-268-269-270-271-272-273-274-275-276-277-278-279-280-281-282-283-284-285-286-287-288-289-290-291-292-293-294-295-296-297-298-299-300-301-302-303-304-305-306-307-308-309-310-311-312-313-314-315-316-317-318-319-320-321-322-323-324-325-326-327-328-329-330-331-332-333-334-335-336-337-338-339-340-341-342-343-344-345-346-347-348-349-350-351-352-353-354-355-356-357-358-359-360-361-362-363-364-365-366-367-368-369-370-371-372-373-374-375-376-377-378-379-380-381-382-383-384-385-386-387-388-389-390-391-392-393-394-395-396-397-398-399-400-401-402-403-404-405-406-407-408-409-410-411-412-413-414-415-416-417-418-419-420-421-422-423-424-425-426-427-428-429-430-431-432-433-434-435-436-437-438-439-440-441-442-443-444-445-446-447-448-449-450-451-452-453-454-455-456-457-458-459-460-461-462-463-464-465-466-467-468-469-470-471-472-473-474-475-476-477-478-479-480-481-482-483-484-485-486-487-488-489-490-491-492-493-494-495-496-497-498-499-500-501-502-503-504-505-506-507-508-509-510-511-512-513-514-515-516-517-518-519-520-521-522-523-524-525-526-527-528-529-530-531-532-533-534-535-536-537-538-539-540-541-542-543-544-545-546-547-548-549-550-551-552-553-554-555-556-557-558-559-560-561-562-563-564-565-566-567-568-569-570-571-572-573-574-575-576-577-578-579-580-581-582-583-584-585-586-587-588-589-590-591-592-593-594-595-596-597-598-599-600-601-602-603-604-605-606-607-608-609-610-611-612-613-614-615-616-617-618-619-620-621-622-623-624-625-626-627-628-629-630-631-632-633-634-635-636-637-638-639-640-641-642-643-644-645-646-647-648-649-650-651-652-653-654-655-656-657-658-659-660-661-662-663-664-665-666-667-668-669-670-671-672-673-674-675-676-677-678-679-680-681-682-683-684-685-686-687-688-689-690-691-692-693-694-695-696-697-698-699-700-701-702-703-704-705-706-707-708-709-710-711-712-713-714-715-716-717-718-719-720-721-722-723-724-725-726-727-728-729-730-731-732-733-734-735-736-737-738-739-740-741-742-743-744-745-746-747-748-749-750-751-752-753-754-755-756-757-758-759-760-761-762-763-764-765-766-767-768-769-770-771-772-773-774-775-776-777-778-779-780-781-782-783-784-785-786-787-788-789-790-791-792-793-794-795-796-797-798-799-800-801-802-803-804-805-806-807-808-809-810-811-812-813-814-815-816-817-818-819-820-821-822-823-824-825-826-827-828-829-830-831-832-833-834-835-836-837-838-839-840-841-842-843-844-845-846-847-848-849-850-851-852-853-854-855-856-857-858-859-860-861-862-863-864-865-866-867-868-869-870-871-872-873-874-875-876-877-878-879-880-881-882-883-884-885-886-887-888-889-890-891-892-893-894-895-896-897-898-899-900-901-902-903-904-905-906-907-908-909-910-911-912-913-914-915-916-917-918-919-920-921-922-923-924-925-926-927-928-929-930-931-932-933-934-935-936-937-938-939-940-941-942-943-944-945-946-947-948-949-950-951-952-953-954-955-956-957-958-959-960-961-962-963-964-965-966-967-968-969-970-971-972-973-974-975-976-977-978-979-980-981-982-983-984-985-986-987-988-989-990-991-992-993-994-995-996-997-998-999-1000-1001-1002-1003-1004-1005-1006-1007-1008-1009-1010-1011-1012-1013-1014-1015-1016-1017-1018-1019-1020-1021-1022-1023-1024-1025-1026-1027-1028-1029-1030-1031-1032-1033-1034-1035-1036-1037-1038-1039-1040-1041-1042-1043-1044-1045-1046

S E R M O N XIII.

The RULE of EQUITY.

In TWO PARTS.

P A R T I.

MAT. vii. 12.

All things whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them ; for this is the Law and the Prophets.

THERE will be none Occasion, in discoursing on these Words, that I should enter on any nice Enquiry concerning their Connection with those which go before them. The Expression [*therefore*] with which they are introduced, is observed to be frequently used, not only as a Mark of Inference, but likewise to denote the Writer's passing from one Subject to another.

376 S E R M O N XIII.

other. And whether we consider these Words as a Part of our Saviour's Discourse recorded in this and the foregoing Chapters, — or as a single independent Rule of Life, the Meaning of them will be much the same, It shall be my Business therefore at present to explain their Meaning ;---to confirm their Truth ;----to represent the Excellency and Usefulness of the Rule they propose to us,---and then to enforce, from several Considerations, a strict Obedience to it.

The Rule before us is of a very large Extent, and of singular Use in the whole Conduct of Life : It comprehends under it all the several Branches both of Justice and Charity ; and, if rightly understood, will direct us how we ought to behave towards one another in all possible Circumstances. This I shall endeavour to shew distinctly, as I proceed in this Discourse.

At present, and before I proceed to those several Particulars which the Subject before us will suggest, I shall only observe, that this Rule was given us by a Person of infinite Wisdom, and of absolute Authority : It is not merely the Direction of a Philosopher, who might deceive others, or be deceived himself,----but issued from him in whom
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S E R M O N XIII. 377

were lodged infinite Treasures of Wisdom; who comprehends, in One View, all the several Relations in which we can stand to one another; who must discern what is in all Cases most proper to be done; and, therefore, who was (the *fittest*, do I say?)---the *only* fit Person to prescribe an universal Rule of Life.

To this Infinity of Wisdom let us add the Perfection of his Authority. He was the Messiah,---the Anointed of God; and, upon that Account, invested with an absolute Right to give us Laws: Nay (which is yet more home to our Purpose), he is God himself; ---One with his Father; and must therefore have this Authority inseparably belonging to him. Let us then consider the Rule before us with that Attention which is due to infinite Wisdom, and with that Reverence which is owing to infinite Authority.

For the more clear and full understanding of this Subject, I shall,

First, State the true Meaning of this Rule, and shew withal with what Restrictions it must be understood.

Secondly, I shall enquire somewhat into the natural Ground and Foundation on which it is built,

Thirdly,

378 S E R M O N XIII.

Thirdly, I shall point out the great Excellency and Usefulness of this Direction, having a particular Eye to what is asserted in the Text, *This is the Law and the Prophets.*

Lastly, I shall shut up all with some farther Considerations which may enforce the Observance of this Precept.

First then, I am to state the true Meaning of this Rule ; and to shew with what Cautions it must be understood.

The general Sense of it, at first Sight, appears to be this ;—That whatever Good or Advantage we should be apt to desire of others, that, in our Turn, we should be free and ready to bestow on others. All those Services and Favours (of whatever kind they be) which we do, or might expect from the Hands of other Men, the same should we grant, when we are in a Capacity of granting them, and applied to for that Purpose. There is implanted in Men a natural Desire of Good : We are directed to it by our Understanding, and we are moved towards it by our Affections : The same Desires which we feel in ourselves, are common to our whole Kind ; and the Import of this Rule is, that we should gratify

S E R M O N XIII. 379

gratify the Requests and Expectations of others, in the same manner as we wish, or hope, or expect, to be gratified ourselves.

If this be the plain and obvious Meaning of the Rule, it is evident it must in like manner forbid, that we should do those ill Turns to our Neighbour, which we ourselves should be apt to resent and grieve at: For we have as much an Aversion to Evil, as we have an Appetite and Desire of Good; and therefore there is as much Reason, why we should abstain from doing that Evil to which, in our own Case, we are averse, as can possibly be imagined, why we should bestow those Favours, which we ourselves expect. Men are naturally Lovers of themselves. Now this Self-love makes us dread Evil, at least as much, and in as great a Degree, as it moves us to desire Good. Both these Passions are founded in One common Principle; and therefore the Rule which obliges us to do that Good to others, which we ourselves desire, must equally bind us to abstain from that Evil, which we ourselves abhor and dread.

Perhaps it will be found, upon Examination, that the Rule before us hath a greater Force in this latter Instance, than in the former,

380 S E R M O N XIII.

mer. It obliges us, without doubt, to Good-will in general ; to pursue the real Interests of our Neighbour, of whatsoever kind they be : But freely to do Good is a much greater Instance of Good-will, than barely to abstain from doing Evil ; and therefore, if this Rule obliges us to do the one, it must more strongly bind us to avoid the other.

To the Observations already offered, we may add here, that the Rule before us (understood as I have now explained it) is much the same with what our Saviour delivers in another Place, where he gives us this Command ; *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself*. This Precept indeed, if understood in too rigorous a Sense, may appear to be a hard Saying ; and there is no one who does, or possibly can, love another with the same Degree of Affection as himself. But if we understand it in that Sense in which I have interpreted the Command in the Text, all Objections will vanish, and the Words appear plain and easy. *To love our Neighbour as ourselves*, then, is to treat him in the very same Manner, as we could wish to be treated by him ; to make our own Desires, in this respect, the Measure of our Conduct ; and, in this Sense, to make the Love of ourselves the Rule of our Love to others. But

S E R M O N XIII. 381

But however truly the general Meaning of a Rule be understood, yet, either through Inadvertence, or Perverseness, Men are often apt to err in applying it. Thus hath it happened in the Case which is now before us.

The Precept then requires, *That we should do to others as we would be done unto ourselves.* From hence some have been apt to run themselves into this Mistake, that they are under no Obligations to do those Services to their Neighbour, which they neither expect nor desire from him themselves. This perverse Interpretation will destroy most of the kind Offices of Good-nature and Charity ;—those at least in which a Requital is neither needed by the one, nor can be expected from the other. A Person, for Instance, in plentiful Circumstances, is, on most accounts, above the Services of the Poor, and incapable of being assisted by them ; and therefore as he cannot expect, so neither can he desire, their Assistance. But shall we therefore say, That a rich Man is under no Obligations, in virtue of this Precept, to do charitable Offices to the Poor ? That he is in no-wise bound to bestow an Alms, because, in his present Circumstances, he neither desires nor needs one ? —God forbid.—This would give such an
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382 S E R M O N XIII.

ill-natured and selfish Sense to the Precept; as is utterly unworthy of a Divine Teacher.

To apply this Rule duly, we must make an Exchange of Circumstances with our Neighbour; that is, we must imagine, that we were in his Circumstances, and he in ours. This will make the Point in a good measure clear; and in the general it may be affirmed, that those good Offices, which, upon such a Change, we might be apt to desire, the same, in the present State of Affairs, are we bound to do.

This, I say, holds true in the general; but yet there may be some Exceptions made to it: For Self-love is not always under the Conduct of Reason; and Passion makes us desire what it may be unfit to grant. No Criminal, for Instance, can be so much in Love with Punishment, as not to desire [to wish at least], that he might be exempted from it; and the Magistrate himself must be conscious, that like Desires would arise in *him* under the same or like Circumstances: Yet it doth by no means follow from hence, that it is unjust to vindicate wholesome Laws, and to execute Wrath on the Disobedient. As the Magistrate *bears the Sword*, so he must remember, that it is his Duty *not to bear the*
Sword

S E R M O N XIII. 383

Sword in vain. This, and the like Cases, therefore, must be excepted out of this general Rule ; and it should be always understood with this Reserve ; *viz.* We should do to others what we desire ourselves, when those Desires are agreeable with sober Reason.

To put another Case : A Person under the Habit and Dominion of Sin, will be exceeding apt to desire all the Occasions and Opportunities of committing it ; and we must be Strangers to human Nature, if we imagine, that we ourselves, in the like Circumstances, should not desire the same. But will this excuse us, if we give way to the Extravagancies of the Vicious and Immoral ?---If we furnish out Matter for Riot and Debauchery ; and encourage, instead of repressing, such Insolence ? By no means. As we must not sin ourselves, so neither must we aid or assist others in the Commission of Sin. Here we are not to consider what our corrupt Appetites might prompt us to desire, if our Appetites should get the better of us,---but what is best, upon the whole, and most suitable to the Will and Pleasure of God.

But, perhaps, after all, the Rule will be best understood, and least liable to Mistake,

384 S E R M O N XIII.

if we restrain the Expression [*All things whatsoever*] to Matters of strict Duty ; and, in consequence of this, interpret it in the following Manner : *All things whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you.* Whatsoever ye might expect that your Neighbours should, in *Point of Duty*, do to you, *do ye so unto them.* Let us suppose ourselves in our Neighbour's Circumstances, and him in ours ; and then ask ourselves this Question ; What is it which we should ask and expect from him as a Matter of Duty ? The Answer which our impartial Mind must make to this Question, will be our proper Rule of Action.

By this Interpretation we avoid the Difficulties already mentioned : For, whatever Desires a Criminal might have of escaping Punishment, and how earnest soever he might be in his Intreaties to the proper Magistrate ; yet it cannot be supposed that he should expect to be gratified in *Point of Duty*. So, again : The habitual Sinner wishes the Occasions and Opportunities of sinning : But can he think that others are obliged to gratify his Inclinations ? By no means. The Cases therefore, when considered in this Light, are so far from being real Difficulties, that they do not relate to our present Rule at all.

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S E R M O N XIII. 385

The same Observation might be applied to several other Instances which are sometimes thought to interfere with this Precept: But I forbear entering farther into Particulars; and I hope the Point is now too clear to need it.

II. I shall therefore proceed to the Second general Head proposed; *viz.* To shew the natural Ground and Foundation on which the Rule before us is built.

Indeed the Reasonableness of this Injunction is so very apparent, that it may be thought scarce to need a Proof. It seems to shine by its own native Light. Though a Man had never heard of Christ, and were incapable of receiving this Precept on the Foot of Divine Revelation, yet, as soon as proposed to him, he could not but approve it as a just and equitable Rule. A Man must have lost all Sense of Humanity not to feel, in some sort, the Wants of other Men: We have a direct Consciousness of our own Needs; and as there is implanted in us a Tendernefs for our Kind, so we cannot but be sensible (if we duly reflect) of that Uneasiness which affects our Neighbour: And if we desire Relief in our own Case, it cannot appear otherwise than fit and proper that we grant it in the Case of others.

386 S E R M O N XIII.

It is true indeed Men are not always apt to conform their Actions to this excellent Rule ; Self-interest and Passion do too frequently get the better of us, and prevail with us to desert our Duty : Yet still, however Men may contradict this Precept in their Lives, they have not Confidence enough to dispute the Equity on which it is built.

The Rule here proposed by our Blessed Lord, is founded on that natural Equality which is observeable amongst Mankind. From whence it follows, that no one Man hath, or possibly can have, any *natural* Right beyond another ; and, consequently, that the Rule of Acting between Man and Man must be one and the same.

For the more clear Apprehension of this Argument, or rather that it may make the deeper Impression on us, I shall distinctly consider the following Particulars ; *viz.*

That all Men are equal as to their Nature :

That, by Consequence, their natural Wants and Desires must ordinarily be the same :

And (which is more), That they stand in the same Degree of Relation to the Supreme Being, their First Cause, and Author.

From whence it follows, that they must have one common Rule of Life ; and nothing is fit and proper to be done to one, which is
not,

S E R M O N XIII. 387

not, under the same Circumstances, as fit to be done to all.

To begin with the natural Equality of Mankind: We are all of us reasonable Beings: We equally consist of a Soul and a Body; of an immortal and a mortal Part: Our natural Advantages are the same, and our natural Imperfections are all alike: If we differ from each other, the natural Equality is still preserved entire; and we are distinguished by such Particulars only as are merely accidental.

We allow readily there may be a Difference of Parts and Capacity in the Mind, This oftentimes appears in Fact: But then, if duly considered, it will be found to arise from something accidental; and therefore can be no Proof of an Inequality of Nature. We see, by Experience, that a Disease or a Misfortune may affect the Mind as much as the Body, and blot out all our lively Images of Things. From hence we may conclude, with a good Shew of Reason, that a Defect of Parts is not owing to any natural Want in the Soul, but to some bodily Disorder, some Indisposition in the animal Frame; and therefore is, strictly and properly, accidental.

A Difference again there must be allowed

388 S E R M O N XIII.

with respect to Mens Station and Condition in the World. It is unavoidable but there must be Rich and Poor ; nor can Society itself be maintained without Superiors and Inferiors. This however is very consistent with what I mentioned before ; *viz.* the natural Equality of all Men. It is plain, that the very same Person may, at different Times, and without the least Change in his Nature, be either Rich or Poor, Superior or Inferior. These several Stations or Conditions in Life are extremely casual : And however Men may be obliged to a different Behaviour towards one another, on account of these various Relations, yet still, as they continue the very same Men, their original and natural Equality will remain the same.

In short, they all partake of the same rational Mind ; their Bodies are formed out of the same common Dust, and cast in the same Mould. These belong to them merely considered as Men ; and therefore, whatever Difference the Accidents of Life may make between them, they are so far as this upon a Level.

It is very remarkable, that Men of the lowest Sense and Attainments do often express a Consciousness of this Principle : They naturally

S E R M O N XIII. 389

turally expect a fair and equal Treatment ; and when they are rudely handled, are apt to complain, that they are not treated as Men. So evident is this Truth, that it is acknowledged by those who have neither Leisure nor Capacities for tedious and deep Researches : They feel a Truth which needs not to be either explained or enforced by accurate and deep Reasonings.

And as Men are equal in reference to their Nature, so are they also as to their ordinary Wants and Desires. Happiness is equally courted by all Men ; and Misery is as much one Man's Aversion as another's : Nay, forasmuch as we are endued with the same kind of Soul, cloathed with the same kind of Body, and formed in the same Manner, it must be presumed, that, generally speaking, the same Objects will be either agreeable or distasteful : So that we may in a good measure learn what are the Desires or Aversions of others, by merely reflecting upon ourselves.

It must be allowed, indeed, that the different Methods of Education,---the different Kinds of Life, and some Variety in the Temper and Constitution of the Body, may make this Rule to vary likewise : And it happens sometimes, that the very same things may be

390 S E R M O N XIII.

agreeable or distasteful to different Persons. Still it should be remembered, that whatever Allowances must be made in this respect, yet Pleasure is equally every Man's Desire, and Pain is equally his Averſion : And therefore there is as much Reason why we should conſult the Happineſs of others by all Ways which lie within our Power, as can be aſſigned why they ſhould promote ours ; why we ſhould abſtain from grieving or afflicting others, as can poſſibly be urged to prove, that others ought to abſtain from grieving and afflicting us.

Before therefore we venture upon any Actions which may interfere with the Happineſs of other Men, or conduce to make them miſerable, let us only conſider our own Appetites and Paſſions ; what would be our own Sentiments in a like Caſe ; how *we* ſhould be apt to regret the Loſs of a Good,---or bear the Infliction of an Evil : The ſame muſt be the Sentiments of that Perſon we are about to injure. If this be duly attended to, we ſhall not only diſcern the Equity of this Rule, but be ſtrongly incited to the Obſervation of it.

To proceed : Men are equal in another regard ; *viz.* as to the natural Relation in
which

S E R M O N XIII. 391

which they stand to God : We are all of us created by his Power, and preserved by his Care : He is the common Father of all Mankind ; and therefore all Mankind are, in this respect, equally related to him. Now, tho' Matters of Grace and Favour may be bestowed according to mere Will, and the Supreme Being is not accountable for the Distribution of his Blessings, yet, upon account of this natural Relation which all Men bear to him, we are sure that every good Man is accepted with him.

Nay, he is pleased to regard us so far, as to bestow many Favours promiscuously on the Good and Bad, *making the Sun to shine, and the Rain to descend, on the Just and the Unjust.*

It is true, indeed, Men may forfeit his Favour by Disobedience to his Will ; and every Sinner, in proportion to his Guilt, set himself at a greater or less Distance from God. However, he is slow to punish, and ready to forgive, and unwilling that the Work of his Hands should perish for ever. It is for this Reason that so many and powerful Motives are used to incite Men to reform their Lives, and so many Offers of Pardon and Grace made. Thus are we, as Creatures

392 S E R M O N XIII.

of the same Almighty Power, the Subjects of the same Divine Care, and capable of the same Divine Favour.

If this be the Case, it is evident, that we must be governed by the same common Rules, and have a Right to the same common Privileges. If God be the Author of all Men, and, consequently, that they all stand in the same Degree of natural Relation to him, it is clear, that he must will the Happiness of all, as far as that Happiness can be obtained consistently with the Reason of Things, and the Methods of Providence. And if the Happiness of all Mankind be the Will of God, then it is as clear, that every particular Person, in proportion to his Abilities, is obliged to contribute to this End; and, of course, that no Man hath any more Reason to expect the Favour and Assistance of others in his own Concerns, than they have, in their turn, to expect and depend on his.

In short; What is reasonable or unreasonable with respect to any one Man, must be equally so with respect to all others in the same Case and Circumstances; it having been observed already that their Natures are all the same;—their Desires and
Aversions

S E R M O N XIII. 393

Aversions the same ; and the Will of God (the common Author of our Being) invariably One.

I should run myself out into too great a Length by prosecuting those other Heads I have proposed to handle on this Subject : Having therefore already stated and explained this Rule, and endeavoured to fix it on its proper Ground and Foundation, I shall intreat your Patience whilst I just suggest a Consideration or two to enforce the Observance of it. And,

1. Let us consider, that to deal by others as we might reasonably desire to be dealt by ourselves, cannot but recommend us to the Favour of the Supreme Being. I have endeavoured to shew, that the Acting by this Rule, is in itself fitting and proper ; and a Being perfectly reasonable cannot but approve those Beings which act agreeably to Reason : Otherwise, why did he implant in us this Principle ? Why did he make us intelligent and reasonable Beings, unless he intended, at the same time, that we should act in Conformity to that Reason he gave us ? And if we answer the End and Intention of God in bestowing such a Nature on us, we cannot but so far approve ourselves in his Sight. To

394 S E R M O N XIII.

To this may be added, that a Point so clearly founded in the Nature and Reasons of things, is farther enforced by the Authority of a positive Command. *Whatsoever ye would, saith our Saviour, that Men should do unto you, do ye so unto them.* Over and above the Consideration that God expressly requires us to conform ourselves to this Rule, we may observe besides, that he hath proposed it to us in a Way the most engaging; by the Ministry of his own Son, sent into the World to promote our present Happiness, and to secure our future. When such an extraordinary Method was taken, the Ways proposed to us cannot be of any low Import. As the End aimed at was great and amazing, so the Means prescribed must be of proportionable Consequence and Value.

I am sensible that I am addressing myself to Persons labouring under the Infirmities which the Corruption of human Nature hath brought upon us. In such Circumstances, Arguments may be more successful which are in themselves less cogent; and the Considerations of this World may sometimes go farther than those of another.

Let it be considered therefore, in the next place, that a strict Conformity to this Rule
must

must recommend us, to the Approbation and Good-will of those Persons with whom we deal. I have observed, that it is in itself equitable ; and as far forth as Men desire to be treated on a Foot of Equity, they cannot but be pleased with those Persons who treat them in this manner. Men *may* mistake, and make Demands on others which are improper to be gratified. Cases of this nature cannot be guarded against : But, generally speaking, a fair and upright Man,---one who makes Conscience how he either denies those Services to another he might have hoped for himself,---or does that Prejudice to another which he himself desires to escape,---must gain Esteem and Favour : He will be honoured and beloved ; every-one will place a Confidence in him : His own Concerns in Life will go on with fewer Difficulties ; and whenever they happen, he cannot fail of that Assistance from others, which, on many Occasions he hath generously bestowed.

Once more, and to dismiss this Subject for the present : To stick invariably to this Rule will approve us to our own Consciences ; will give us Occasion of reflecting on our past Lives with Comfort ; will make us easy in Life, and support and bear us up under the
 Agonies

396 S E R M O N XIII.

Agonies of Death. We cannot but be pleased with thinking that we have acted a fair and equitable Part on all Occasions : For there is implanted in Mankind a natural Love of Justice ; and what we value in others, we shall more highly approve in ourselves. This might be confirmed from the Experience of every-one who hears me. We do, and must always, reflect on this kind of Conduct with Satisfaction. The same Pleasures which arise from the Sense of our past equitable Behaviour, will attend the future ; and, which is still infinitely better, the Memory of the Good we have done in this Life, we shall carry with us into the other : Our good Deeds will in this Sense follow us ; and those things which are at present our Duty, will hereafter prove our Reward.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, &c.
Amen.

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SERMON XIV.

The RULE of EQUITY.

PART II.

MAT. vii. 12.

All things whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them ; for this is the Law and the Prophets.

I Proposed, in a former Discourse on these Words,

To State the Meaning of the Rule here proposed, and to shew with what Restrictions it must be understood :

To enquire into the natural Ground and Foundation on which it is built :

To Point out the great Excellency and Usefulness of this Direction, having a particular Eye to what is asserted in the Text ; *This is the Law and the Prophets* : And then,

398 S E R M O N XIV.

To close all with some farther Considerations, which may enforce the Observation of this Precept.

The Two former Heads have been already treated at large. I shall therefore proceed, at present, to consider the Excellency and Usefulness of the Rule before us.

The Excellency of any Law will very much consist in this; That the Sense of it is plain and obvious, and not easy to be mistaken by a sober and well-meaning Man. Now this, I conceive, is very remarkable in the Point before us; nor would there have been any Occasion for explaining this Rule, had not the Perverseness of Mankind made it necessary. Every Man, if he be in earnest, will easily see what he might reasonably demand of others upon an Exchange of Circumstances; and the Rule requires, that we should direct our own Actions by this plain and equitable Measure.

It is farther to be observed, that this Rule is not only plain with respect to the Sense and Meaning of it, but also with regard to the Ground and Reason on which it is built. It is so very evident of itself, that it is hardly capable of farther Proof: And he who is so far lost to Reason, or biased by his corrupt Passions,

S E R M O N XIV. 399

Passions, as not to discern the Equity of this Direction, will hardly be persuaded by any Arguments which can be offered.

I have, in my former Discourse, pursued this Duty home to the Principle and Foundation on which it is built; and though I am convinced of the Strength and Force of the Arguments offered, yet it may be questioned after all, whether the Obligations to this Duty be made at all the clearer by them. I therefore introduced what was then offered on that Head, with this Observation; That it would serve chiefly to make Impressions on us, and be of more use to *move*, than to instruct us.

But, besides the Plainness of the Rule, it recommends itself to us upon another account; *viz.* that it is *universal* as to its Extent: It takes in the whole Duty between Man and Man; our Saviour having asserted in the Text, that *this is the Law and the Prophets*; or, as it is expressed in another place, on this *hang all the Law and the Prophets*.

There can be no Instance of social Duty whatsoever assigned, which may not be deduced from this Rule. This will appear, if we take a short View of the several Precepts
con-

400 S E R M O N XIV.

contained in the Second Table of the Commandments.

Thus : *Honour thy Father and thy Mother* ; that is, all thy Superiors ; for in this large Sense the Precept is, and must be, understood. Does not every Superior expect this Honour from those who are subject to him ? And is not every Man conscious, that were his Circumstances altered, he himself should reasonably demand it ? Let him therefore act by this Rule ; and pay that Respect to his Superiors of every kind, which, in their Circumstances, he himself would think his Due.

Thou shalt do no Murder. Every Man is fond of Life, and naturally starts at all Attempts which are made upon it. Be therefore as cautious of invading another in this respect, as thou art desirous of being secure thyself : Or, if we enlarge the Precept, and consider it as condemning all intemperate Anger or Malice, — who is there that does not censure such Proceedings in another, when he himself becomes the Sufferer ? But Reason is the same with regard to all ; and if Malice be inexcusable in our Neighbour, it must be so in us too.

Thus, again : *Thou shalt not commit Adultery.*

S E R M O N XIV. 401

tery. Every Man would think himself highly injured by a Violation of the Marriage Honour. No one excuses Offences of this kind in another ; especially if a Sister, or a Daughter, or any other near Relation, suffers : The Disgrace, by this means contracted, spreads itself ; and whole Families feel the Injury. Here the Rule, I have been hitherto considering, comes in, and will be proper to direct our Actions. Let Men do, in this Case, as they would be done unto ; and religiously abstain from such a Conduct as they would condemn in another Person.

Are not the Precepts relating to *Theft* and *false Witness*, clearly deducible from the same fruitful Principle ? All Men are willing to maintain their Property ; and think themselves wronged, when invaded, in this respect, either by Force or Fraud. He that *judgeth*, in this manner, *condemneth himself, if he practises that thing which he condemneth.* According to this Principle, it matters little whether the Fact be committed in public View, or concealed, in the surest Manner, from the Inspection of the World. A Man's own Conscience is more to him than Ten thousand Witnesses : The Sense, that he would not be treated thus himself, whenever

402 S E R M O N XIV.

attended to, must fill him with Anxiety ; and however he may, on other accounts, escape, yet he can never flee from his own guilty Mind.

Once more : Whether in civil Causes, or in private Intercourse, there is no one but must resent false Witness and Misrepresentation. It is grievous when a Man suffers under the Accusations of a slanderous Tongue. Let every Man therefore, who loves and values his own Reputation, be tender of another's : Let him keep a strict Guard on his Words ; and say nothing to the Disadvantage of another Man's Character, but as in the Presence of God, and under the Solemnity of an Oath.

With respect to our Duty towards our Neighbour, Men often perplex themselves with needless Doubts and Difficulties. I am persuaded, that, in common Cases at least, the general Rule before us would be of infinite Service ; and, duly attended to, would easily direct us without any other Guide. Let a Man faithfully ask himself this Question ; What kind of Behaviour he would think others obliged to use towards *him* in such or such Circumstances ?—And the impartial Answer will shew him how he ought to act himself. There

S E R M O N XIV. 403

There are Two Cases which regard common Life, and are of the highest Importance to us, which will receive a Determination from the Principle before us; I mean, the Case,

1. Of common Dealing in the Transactions between Man and Man. And,

2. Of Restitution, where the proper Rules of Dealing have not been punctually observed by us.

It is Matter of just Complaint, that Equity and Fairness have been too little observed in the World. Men in higher Station are apt sometimes to be polished out of their Sincerity; and the very Rules of Breeding are not always consistent with the Laws of Justice. What is complained of in higher Life, descends, in some Instances, to Men of a lower Rank: Common Business is transacted with Artifice; and it is become the chief Mystery in Trade, to know how to guard against the Deceits of others, and to practise them with most Success themselves.

The Affair of ordinary Dealing may be considered either with reference to the Seller, or the Purchaser; and the principal Rules which are serviceable on this Occasion, may be easily applied to both.

404 S E R M O N XIV.

If we regard the Precept in my Text, and make Conscience of doing that to another, which we are unwilling should be done to us, then we shall never endeavour to impose on the Ignorance or Unskilfulness of those with whom we deal : Every Man would be apt to resent such Conduct towards himself ; and therefore every Man is concerned to avoid the Fault which he condemns in others.

The Nature of Bargaining and Commerce consists in this : That it is an Exchange of something to be given in one kind, for somewhat to be received in another kind : And the Ground and Foundation of Mens Proceeding, in this Case, is, a supposed Equality, in point of Value, between the Things exchanged. To make the Bargain firm, a Consent on both Sides is necessary ; and Consent always implies, as well a right Apprehension in the Understanding, as a full Concurrence of the Will. If Two Persons therefore, in common Dealing, shall grossly misunderstand one another, — *however* they may appear to agree in Words, they really disagree as to the Things themselves ; and, consequently, tho' the Bargain may hold good in a Court of Law, yet Conscience will determine otherwise ; and find such an important Defect, as makes

S E R M O N XIV. 405

makes the whole Proceeding irregular and wrong.

I will chuse to explain myself by an Instance: Children are supposed unfit to make any regular Bargain, because incompetent Judges of the real Value of the Things exchanged; and, if it be found necessary sometimes, for the Dispatch of Business, to transact Affairs by their Means, yet it is thought highly disingenuous to take any Advantage of their Inexperience. Every-one condemns such a Proceeding in others. The Case is the same with regard to Persons of a riper Age, if they labour under such Defects, as reduce them to the State and Condition of Children. So far as this, there is no Difficulty, and the most artful Managers will agree with me: But they apprehend a great Difference in the Case, when they have to deal with Persons whose Reason is ripe and vigorous. Here they claim a greater Liberty; and think it entirely right to take all Advantages they can against them: But it would become Men not to make too bold in a Point where Equity is so much concerned. If Skill and Knowledge in the general be necessary to fit Men for transacting Affairs of Commerce, then a particular Knowledge of the Matters

406 S E R M O N XIV.

about which they treat, is equally necessary in particular Cases: And if to take Advantage of Mens Ignorance be, in the former Instance, blameable, it must equally be so in the latter. It signifies little what Mens general Knowledge be, if they are plainly mistaken in the single Point about which they are then dealing: And no thinking Person can imagine he hath any more Liberty to cheat the Man, than the Child. What! then, it will be said, is the Dealer concerned to decline the Opportunity of a lucky and Advantageous Bargain?—Yes; in some Cases he may; and that upon this Principle, that no Gain is worth the making, which cannot be made with Innocence: For our Saviour hath fully determined the Point in these Words; *What shall a Man be profited, if he gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul?*

What I have here proposed, I lay down in the general: The particular Application of it must be referred to the Consciences of Men: I pretend not to determine precisely how much either the Buyer or Seller may be allowed to gain, consistently with the Rules of Equity: This, no doubt, must admit a Latitude; and is not to be judged of, but by those who are concerned in Business. Thus much,

S E R M O N XIV. 407

much, however, I may be allowed to observe, that since the thing must, in the Course of Affairs, be referred chiefly to themselves, they are the more concerned not to make a wrong Judgment about it; and, I conceive, they cannot direct themselves by a better Rule than this; That they should not make any greater Advantages of other Men, than they would be willing to allow themselves, tho' they were fully apprised of the real State and Condition of the Thing. This only is a doing as they would be willing to be done unto.

But if Men are concerned, in consequence of the Rule established by our Saviour, not to impose on the Ignorance or Unskilfulness of those they deal with, they must be under Obligations still greater, not to use any Methods which shall lead Men into an Error, whether it be done by express Words, or merely by their Actions. This is what commonly passes under the Name of *Cheating*; though the Words, as I observed before, may be carried somewhat farther, and take in some other things too, which are usually accounted Dexterity and good Management.

I think, under this Head may be reduced all undue Value which is sometimes set on

408 S E R M O N XIV.

the Things Men sell ;—all excessive under-rating the Things they are about to buy. In Practices of this kind, something, surely, is intended : And what, I would desire to know, can be the Design of it, but to lead either the Purchaser or the Seller into a Mistake ? To insinuate a Value different from what really belongs to things ; and by this means to drive an unequal and injurious Bargain. Can this be thought an acting uprightly, or a doing by others as they would willingly be done unto themselves ?

Mens Conduct, in this regard, is still more blameable, when they purposely conceal Defects ; when they either hide what is faulty, and might otherwise abate the Price they set on things ;—or do not place Matters in a just and proper Light to the Person they are about to deal with. This is so low and mean a Practice, that Men of Reputation are generally above it : It is the Sign of a little and base Mind ; and if a Man should find a present Advantage in it, he will lose full as much in his Credit, as he can possibly gain by his Cunning.

Of the same kind is another Method sometimes used ; *viz.* the pretending and making a Shew of some particular and extraordinary
Excel-

S E R M O N XIV. 409

Excellency in things ; — something which shall catch the Fancy of the Purchaser ; and whilst it raises his Desire, shall impose on his Understanding. But is this really a fair or equitable Method of Proceeding ? Should we judge it right to be treated thus ourselves ; to have Practices tried on our Simplicity ; — and the Imagination bribed, in order to betray the Judgment ? We shall be easily led to determine rightly on the Case, by keeping our Saviour's Maxim in View ; — *Whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye so unto them.*

In the Affair of common Dealing, there is another important Rule still behind ; *viz.* That we should not take any undue Advantages of the Occasions and Necessities of those we deal with. This is by no means a treating with Men on an equal Foot, -- but a making them pay even for their Poverty. There are Instances indeed to be assigned, in which some Advantages may equitably be made. The Purchaser may have none Occasion to buy, as the Seller may be under no Necessity to part with what he has. What therefore can reasonably prevail, either with the one or the other, in such a Case, to deal at all ? Nothing, surely, but some special Advantage, which

410 · S E R M O N XIV.

which may make it worth while to do so. Yet, even in these Cases, there is something due, as well to our Neighbour, as ourselves : And common Compassion for the Distresses of our Brethren, should prevent our bearing too hard upon them. It is unjust to deceive or impose upon another to his Prejudice ; but to take Advantage of his very Necessities to oppress him the more, is barbarous. Every Man feels this to the Purpose in his own particular Case ; and every-one ought to be as sensible of it in another Man's. Here likewise our Saviour's Rule will be highly serviceable ;—and common Sense may teach us to apply it right.

I have offered some Reflections on the Case of common Dealing, in the Transactions between Man and Man. It will not be improper to add something farther concerning the Case of Restitution, where the proper Rules of Dealing have not been punctually observed by us.

By Restitution in general, must be meant, the making Amends, either in Kind or Value, for any Prejudices we may have done another against the Rules of Justice and Equity ; and the Obligation to it, in the several Instances now particularly in View, is founded on this Maxim ;

S E R M O N X I V . 411

Maxim ; That what a Man had no Right to gain, he can really have no Right to keep. If a Man therefore shall defraud another in any of the Ways before insisted on, the unrighteous Gain ought to be strictly accounted for : He holds just so much in his Hand, which in Conscience belongs to another ; and to detain it, is to support one Iniquity by a greater.

I know, Men, in such Cases, are apt to make themselves easy with the Thought, that they are out of the Reach of Law ; and that no Demands in that Way can be made on them. This may be true : But then it should be remembered, that human Laws can reach but a little Way towards making Men truly honest : They are rather Guards against the more gross and notorious Instances of Wickedness, than Rules for the perfect Practice of Virtue ; and he who is carried no farther than these may force him, may be as wicked almost as he pleases : Discretion may teach him to avoid those Enormities which are punishable by the Magistrate ; but Conscience, and a Sense of what is equitable and just, will make him look much higher.

But if this should still be insisted on ; That Men are not bound to Restitution for Iniquities

412 S E R M O N XIV.

ties in common Dealing, because the Laws of their Country may not in such Case reach them; — if this, I say, should still be insisted on,---it might as well be pleaded, That these very Iniquities themselves are allowable; — because, in most of the Instances before produced, no sufficient Provisions are made by Law: The Offenders take Advantage of those Defects which necessarily attend human Laws; and venture to deceive, cheat, and oppress, because no Remedies may be obtained from thence. But will any serious Man conclude, that Practices of this kind are therefore innocent? I hope what hath been already advanced on those Particulars, will be sufficient to prove the contrary; and no one who considers in what Manner he expects to be treated himself, can any longer raise a Question about it.

Still there is another Refuge to which Men sometimes betake themselves, whilst they are conscious of having made unjust Advantages in their several Dealings, and yet unwilling to repair the Injuries they have done: They persuade themselves, that all may be set at rights by some little Acts of Charity; that this will atone for the Iniquity of their Conduct, and reconcile them fully to their God.

And,

S E R M O N XIV. 413

And, in truth, if it shall happen, that Men know not who the Persons are they have in a long Course of Life defrauded, the Method proposed may be fit and proper : The Gains they have made this Way are unlawful to be retained ; and therefore, if they are really at a Loss to whom in particular Reparation is justly due,—it may be highly expedient to make that Satisfaction to the Public, which they cannot tell how to give in any other Way. Thus the Publican in the Gospel, conscious of his Transgressions, declares, that *One Half of his Goods he would give to the Poor*. But then we should observe withal, that this was not intended to prejudice the equitable Claims, which others might have upon him : For he adds immediately,—*And if I have wronged any-one by false Accusation, I restore him Fourfold*. The Proceeding was doubtless right : For what Authority can any-one have to dispose, in pretended Charities, what, in truth, belonged to another Man ; and, therefore, what was not properly his own to give ?

As I have observed before, what a Man had no Right to gain, he can have no Right to keep ; and what he hath no Right to keep, he can have no Right to dispose of, but to
those

414 S E R M O N XIV.

those to whom it is justly owing. Now, if this be true, then all the unequitable Gains Men have made, ought to be considered by them as just so much plundered from others; as that to which they themselves have no manner of Right in Conscience; and, therefore, what ought to be rendered back, as far as they have Power and Opportunities of doing it.

Let us put ourselves in the Case of those who are injured and oppressed: Should we not think we were justly entitled to Satisfaction and Amends? Should we be persuaded, that another had any Right to hold from us what he had only Art and Dexterity enough to gain? No, certainly: And therefore, if, in such Cases, we should be apt to expect Satisfaction, and think we were injured by having it with-held from us, — it is clear enough how we ourselves ought to act: The Rule is plain; and our Practice must be suited to it.

Hitherto I have endeavoured to shew the Excellency of our Saviour's Rule, not only as it is clear and plain, but likewise as it is full and comprehensive; and this I have supported by a direct Application of it to several important Instances. To this I will add farther,

S E R M O N XIV. 415

ther, that by making the Case of our Neighbour our own, we take the best Method to incite and quicken ourselves in the Discharge of our Duty. Every-one loves himself; and consequently must be moved with a very ardent Affection towards every thing which appears to him to be good; and must abhor, in like manner, what shall appear to be Evil. It is this Principle, unduly managed, which tempts Men to injure others: For whilst we consider their Happiness as inconsistent with our own, it is no Wonder if we are led astray, and do those Actions, which our impartial Reason must condemn. The best Method therefore is to suppose ourselves in the Circumstances of our Neighbour: This will at once rectify our Judgments, and direct our Passions. It is easy to discover what we ourselves, in such a Case, might desire; and by making this Case our own, we raise the same Passions which we should be apt to feel, were such a Change of Circumstances real. Every-one knows how easy it is to raise in ourselves an Extravagance of Anger by imaginary Injuries, and a bare Supposition of ill Turns done us: We may as well raise, in the same Way, any other Passion; and the Love we bear.

416 S E R M O N XIV.

bear to ourselves, will, in some Sense, compel us to equal Treatment, when we consider our Neighbour's Circumstances as our own. This imaginary Change is the more easily made,—or (in other Words) we shall be the more easily led to suppose ourselves in our Neighbour's Case, if we consider, that the Affairs of Mankind are variable; that we have no Security of maintaining our present State; but (for any thing we can prove) a few Days may reduce us to a Necessity of begging those Favours, which it is now in our Power to grant.

But without looking forward to Possibilities, and putting Cases which may be as well put on the other Side,—we shall see how this Rule enforces itself, by reflecting on our present Circumstances. All Men are dependent on one another; nor can any Man enjoy himself, or indeed so much as subsist, without receiving equal Treatment from Men, as well below, as above him;—and depending on them for several things, which are Matters rather of Favour, than strict Right. Now, if this be the Case (as I appeal to the Conscience of every Man for the Truth of it); — if we are so often incited by our own Wants, and reminded of equal
Wants

S E R M O N XIV. 417

Wants in others : — If we know what Distress is,---and how powerfully Desires press us ; — methinks, it must be impossible to make our Neighbour's Case our own, without acting in such a Manner as we should wish he would do to us : We must unavoidably feel his Distresses or Desires ; and by relieving him, do the greatest Favour to ourselves.

This leads me to the Last thing I proposed to speak to on this Subject ; *viz.* To suggest some farther Considerations, which may enforce the Observance of this Precept.

It will be proper to observe here, that the general Practice of the Rule before us must unavoidably conduce to the Benefit and Happiness of Mankind. The greatest Part of the Evils which befall us arise from interfering Interests or Humours, and the perverse Behaviour of one Man towards another. In this Case, Men are disappointed of what they desired, or expected ; and the Disappointment bears hard upon them. Nor is this all : They are not content to bear their present Share of Ill ; they go on to aggravate and increase their Misfortunes by such Quarrels as are pernicious, as well to themselves, as others. But if this Rule of *Doing as we would*

418 S E R M O N XIV.

be done unto were punctually observed, no Injuries would be offered at all; no Requests made but what were reasonable; none denied which were fit to be granted: Because no one can bear an Injury without Uneasiness; no one would willingly admit unreasonable Demands; or care to be denied what is fit and proper to be granted. The Consequence of this must be, the strictest Love and Unity; and the making all the Powers and Abilities of the whole Society subservient to each single Person. Nay, if it be farther examined, it will perhaps be found, that the conscientious Discharge of this Duty will indirectly influence us in every other Particular.

Thus, as to those Points which are commonly supposed to relate only to a Man's ownself;---such as are Temperance, Sobriety, and the like: Whosoever desires that another should do him all reasonable Services, must desire withal, that he should preserve himself in a Capacity of doing them: But Want of Temperance will render Men in a great measure incapable of answering these Expectations. If therefore, upon this account, it is the reasonable Wish of all Men, that every other Person should be temperate and sober; — and if we ourselves are apt to condemn
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S E R M O N XIV. 419

the opposite Vices in our Neighbour,—it is plain, by barely attending to this Rule; how we ought to act ourselves. Every thinking Parent naturally desires that his Children should discharge their Duty; and every Child as naturally desires the same in his Parent: Let each therefore suppose himself in the other's Circumstance, and our Saviour's Precept will become a general Rule of Life. All the Happiness therefore which can arise from the uniform Practice of Virtue, will be found to arise from the Observation of the present Rule; since it appears, by the foregoing Argument, that it hath a strong Influence on the Practice of every Virtue whatsoever.

It should be farther considered, that the Observation of this Precept will yield inexpressible Satisfaction to a Man's own Mind; and such as will far exceed all the Gratifications which this World is capable of affording us. To act according to Reason, and the Nature of Things, must be pleasant to a thinking Man; and the oftener he reflects upon it, the higher must his Satisfaction rise; there being this remarkable Difference between the Pleasures of Sense and of Reason, that as the one decrease, so the other improve, upon Enjoyment. But besides, that the

420 S E R M O N XIV.

acting in conformity to Reason, in this Instance, must be highly agreeable, merely considered as it is in itself fitting and proper : — Besides this, I say, we may add, that Nature hath implanted in us a strong Principle of Tenderness towards others ; insomuch, that a Man cannot ordinarily be easy under the Distresses which happen to other Men : We do, as it were, feel the Wants of our Neighbour, and labour under the very Misfortunes which he suffers. Accordingly (unless Men have debauched their Natures very far), they must be pleased with the good Fortune which happens to their Neighbours, and partake, in some measure, of their Happiness and Enjoyments. Now, if this be true, how much greater Satisfaction must arise from the Sense of having ourselves contributed to their Good, and been the Authors of that Happiness which they enjoy ? We shall be easily persuaded, that what hath been here said is not a mere empty Speculation, if we do but venture the Experiment : And I doubt not in the least, but, if we take this Course, we shall be so sensibly affected by it, that we shall judge the very Practice of this Duty, by the Pleasure which it yields, is a Reward for itself.

I shall

S E R M O N XIV. 421

I shall shut up all with observing, in the Last place, that the Favour of God, and the Assurance of a blessed Immortality, as the Consequence of his Favour, are Motives of infinite Weight and Importance : And this, we are taught in Holy Scripture, must be the Reward of all those who endeavour to maintain the Laws of Righteousness and Equity. The Rule which I have been treating of, is not only a Law of Reason, but a Precept of the Gospel ; and therefore must entitle us to all those glorious Promises which are made us in the Gospel. Thus then, by discharging this Duty, we not only promote the general Happiness of Mankind, and the Peace and Satisfaction of our own Minds,—but, beyond all this, we secure an Inheritance which never faileth ; *The Love of God, which passeth all Understanding*,—and Joys at once unutterable and eternal. May we learn to be wise in this Manner,—and to unite our Interests in both Worlds.

Now to God the Father, God the Son,
&c. Amen.

SERMON XV.

The Moral Infirmary of Human Nature considered.

MAT. XXV. 5.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

THE Condition of Things under the Gospel, is set forth to us by a Variety of Representations; each of which inculcates on us, in a very lively Manner, the Duties we are to discharge, and the Encouragements of Obedience. But, beyond this, in the Parable before us, we are likewise instructed how Men will behave in fact; — whether by pursuing the great Purposes intended by our Religion, or else by neglecting them. Thus, we see, *The Kingdom of*
E e 4 Heaven.

424 S E R M O N XV.

Heaven is likened unto Ten Virgins;—and Five of them were wise, and Five were foolish [ver. 1, 2.] Their different Conduct clearly justifies the several Characters assigned them; for though they set out, all of them alike, on the very same Design, — yet the one Sort only regarded the Means conducive to it, whilst the other contented themselves with having chosen the End, without bestowing so much as one Thought on the right Measures for attaining it.

But what I am to note at present as a Point proper to be considered by us, relates to the Conduct of the Wise themselves; who, tho' they answered, in a good measure, the Purposes of Providence, as well in the Choice of Means as Ends,---are yet accused of certain Degrees of Negligence;---of not acting a constant and uniform Part, and prosecuting these Means with uninterrupted Vigour. Thus it is charged, as well on the Wise as on the Foolish, that *while the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

However, it should be observed, that whilst this Conduct is distinctly noted, our Blessed Lord hath shewn exceeding Tenderness towards us: He hath just remarked the Thing itself, without making any severe Reflections

S E R M O N XV. 425

fections upon it; and by the Conclusion of the Parable, he insinuates clearly, that the Matter was rather owing to Infirmary, than Disregard. This was the Interpretation he was pleased to make of his Disciples Behaviour on another like Occasion;---*The Spirit indeed is willing, but the Flesh is weak.*

And, in truth, on any other Foot than this, the Virgins, here described, could not support the general Character given them. Had their Negligence been gross and excusable,---or owing to any settled Principles of Vice,---*their Lamps* likewise *must have gone out*, and the Bridegroom have found them unprepared. But, as the contrary appears, the Conclusion which offers itself, is plainly this; That the very best and wisest Men are subject to Infirmities; which, though they detract from the Perfection of their Services, yet will not destroy the Reward of them.

This Doctrine, concerning "The moral Infirmary of human Nature," I shall illustrate and confirm:— And then represent those Points of Instruction, which the Consideration of this Doctrine suggests to us.

This Point in the general is Matter of Experience; what the greatest Men have ever acknowledged, and we ourselves are conscious of,

426 S E R M O N XV.

of, whenever we consider coolly. No human Character is entirely perfect. The greatest moral Accomplishments have some unhappy Qualities mixed with them, which draw Men out of the straight Road of Duty ; and tho', by extraordinary Care, they should escape the grosser Acts of Vice, yet there are Faults enough to be found in their Conduct of a lesser Size. Nay, supposing more than can reasonably be imagined in this frail State of Things ;—supposing a Man so abundantly good, as to keep free from the direct Breaches of God's Laws, yet our best Actions are, in certain Degrees, imperfect : They fall short of their proper Rule ; and cannot bear the strict Survey of infinite Purity.

Thus much is certain in the general ; yet, to make a stronger Impression on our Minds, I shall consider the Point more distinctly ;—shall shew in what Particulars this moral Infirmary betrays itself, — and from what Principles it may be thought to arise.

Here then it will be proper to observe, in the First place, that, notwithstanding what may be advanced to the Advantage of human Reason, there is *some* Ignorance to be found in all Men, — and *much* in the far greater Number. This, in some Cases, is affected ;
in

S E R M O N X V. 427

in others, unavoidable : But whichsoever it be, the Effect on their Behaviour will be much the same. The proper Rules of Life are not always understood. The very Wifest sometimes err ;---mistake either as to the general Precept, or the particular Application of it. This was more remarkably visible whilst human Reason was their only Guide : Their best formed Schemes of Morality were defective in some Points, and erroneous in others ; and therefore, *whilst the very Light within them was Darkness, how great was that Darkness!* Now, indeed, we are relieved, in great measure, by a kind and merciful Providence. The Divine Will is laid open to us by express Revelation ; and we are, in an high Sense of the Expression, *taught of God.* But what if there still remains some Incapacity, or Indisposition at least, in the Learner ? What if Want of Apprehension, or the Occasions of Life, or Laziness and Indolence, shall set some below others in spiritual Improvements ? The Consequence must be plainly this ; their Conduct will be as irregular as their Understandings were defective.

This, however, is the least Source of moral Infirmary. The more general Rules of Religion

428 S E R M O N XV.

Religion and Morality can scarce be mistaken; — at least without some very faulty Negligence. Yet, it is One thing to know the Rule itself, and another to apprehend the several Motives sufficient to enforce it. The Understanding, by itself, can serve only to shew the Way, and direct Men what to do; but as the immediate Principle of Action is of another kind, so it requires something farther to influence it. This Principle is entirely governed by the Reasons of Action; which being of various Kinds, will require no small Compass of Mind to apprehend them. Some of these are drawn from the Harmony of Things, and the Beauty of Actions; some from a Sense of Gratitude; some from the Expectations of Divine Favour; some from the Advantages of this present Life; and some from the Consideration of future Reward or Punishment. All these assist each other, and supply the Defects which each might have in a separate Consideration. But what Man hath a comprehensive View of all these Motives? Many have but a low Taste of moral Beauty; --- a slight Sense of Gratitude; are thoughtless about the Pleasure or Displeasure of God; --- are rather governed by a present View of Things, than the remote

Consequences

S E R M O N X V. 429

Consequences they may produce; and, as to future Rewards or Punishments (what Weight soever they ought to have), they are at a great Distance, and too apt to be disregarded: And where some of these are understood and attended to (as no doubt they often are), the Sense of them however is imperfect; at least they are weak, whilst unassisted by those others, which might enforce them, and give them a stronger Influence on the Mind.

Over and above what hath been advanced hitherto, it is farther to be remarked, that Means are necessary to forward Virtue, as well as Motives to enforce it: For, as Difficulties will occur, these must, some Way or other, be removed or counteracted. Hence it comes to pass, that besides the Knowledge of what is proper, and of the several Reasons of Action,—Temptations must carefully be avoided;—in some Cases, one Passion must be encouraged to balance another;—the whole System of the Mind must be examined;—the secret Dependencies of one thing on another noted; and the several inward Movements adjusted. All this is necessary in order to carry on an uniform Course of Virtue. But what Man is sufficient
for

430 S E R M O N XV.

for all these Things? Who is there so thoroughly acquainted with himself, as to know perfectly all the secret and remote Principles of his Actions? And yet, where Men fail in this, their Conduct will be more or less uncertain; and though regular in the main, yet subject to many little Starts and Deviations.

Thus far I have endeavoured to account for the moral Infirmary of human Nature, from the Consideration of Ignorance. I shall take a Step farther, and note, that however perfect our Knowledge might be supposed, there is yet another Misfortune attending us, which must frequently disappoint the Effects of this Knowledge; I mean, a Want of Attention to those Matters which we know.

It is certain, that no Rules can direct our Conduct, unless they are immediately present to the Mind; nor can we be influenced by any Motives which are not attentively considered by us. The habitual Sense of these things (which may be called the Knowledge of them), will therefore be of little Avail, unless we are constantly looking about us, and ready to bring this Knowledge forth upon every emergent Occasion. But do the Generality of Christians keep these Matters perpetually

S E R M O N XV. 431

petually in View? Are they always prepared when the Opportunities of Action present themselves? On the contrary, every Man is, more or less, inadvertent;---apt to start aside from the very Rules he approves, and to act without regard to the general and settled Principles of his Actions. This is the known State of Things; and will of itself account for the Behaviour of the Virgins referred to in the Gospel; who, notwithstanding they set out on the noblest Design, yet, *whilst the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

Add to this another Source of moral Infir-
mity; to wit, A Want of Courage and Re-
solution; --- a Virtue highly necessary, no
doubt, since Temptations are so apt to cross
us, and so many Hardships must be encoun-
tered by us. Of this Defect, Instances suf-
ficient may be met with; and the Scriptures
themselves supply us with them in Characters,
on other Accounts, extraordinary. What
but this induced *St. Peter* to deny his Lord,
---and the other Apostles to forsake him?
They were overcome by a present Sense of
Danger, which would not suffer them to col-
lect their Thoughts; and to act bravely. But
the main thing I am to observe here, is of
another

432 S E R M O N XV.

another Kind ; as relating not so much to the Dangers we may be exposed to, as the Opposition we may meet with. This likewise requires some Strength and Vigour of Mind, —more than the Generality, upon all Occasions, are Masters of. Some Men can scarce prevail with themselves to resolve at all ; or, if they do, how weak and feeble are their Resolutions ! Others can master lesser Difficulties, and go through with Credit ; but when assaulted by stronger Temptations, they are lost : Their Courage then fails them, when it most concerns them to be resolute.

And, after all, whatever Strength of Mind they may have, yet as the Assaults upon their Virtue are perpetual,—as they are no Moment disengaged from Duty, or the Difficulties which attend it, it is odds but they fail in several Instances. This is one great Reason why no human Character can be entirely perfect : It will always require certain Grains of Allowance ; and must be judged of, rather by its great and principal Strokes, than by the lesser Beauties which might serve to finish it.

The Importance of Resolution in the religious and moral Life,----and, consequently, the Infirmary which must arise from any
Defect

S E R M O N XV. 433

fect here, will farther appear from considering our inward Biass and Tendency to Sin. The thing itself being Matter of Experience, I shall wave the Proof of Fact; and chuse rather to observe somewhat on its Principles and Causes.

In the First place, our Nature is corrupted; *gone off from original Righteousness*,--and that Aptness to behave properly which it enjoyed in its first Constitution. The Cause of this (however difficult to be accounted for in the Way of Reason) is distinctly mentioned in Holy Scripture; where we are informed, that the First Man, created in Innocence, fell from that State,---and having corrupted his Nature, conveyed it down in the same Pollution to his Posterity. Hence the Seeds of Vice planted in our very Constitution, must require great Care to watch over them;—much Activity to keep them under, or to root them out; and strong Resolution to maintain a never-failing Combat between the opposite Principles of the spiritual and the natural Life: And, after all that is, or can be, done this Way, the Corruption itself will still remain in some sort;—afford constant Matter to exercise our Courage;—and, in many

434 S E R M O N XV.

Instances, prove too stubborn to be mastered by our best-formed Resolutions.

Beyond this, it should be remarked, in the next place, that each Man hath some particular Inclinations proper to himself;—some which rise to an higher Degree than ordinary,---and prove the governing Principles of his Actions. These are owing, either to Temper and Complexion,---or the particular Method of Education, — or the Climate where he lives,---or the kind of Life he pursues, — or the Company he keeps, — or to some other like Causes, too many to be distinctly mentioned. Sins which arise from Principles of this kind, the Psalmist terms, *Our own Iniquities*; and the Apostle, in another place, calls them, the *Sins that do so easily beset us*. Hence arise farther Trials of our Resolution;---Difficulties not to be mastered by ordinary Care;---but which require a Diligence and Zeal proportioned to the Greatness of the Occasion. And, if it should be supposed, that the general Bias to Sin might be so far controuled, as to prevent our falling into direct Acts of Vice,---yet here are Enemies more formidable;---Corruptions ingrafted on a Constitution of itself corrupt; and

S E R M O N XV. 435

and therefore it cannot be wondered, if Irregularities are occasioned, where the Circumstances of Mankind are so unfavourable.

I shall add one Consideration more on this Head; and that is drawn from the unhappy Growth of our sensual Appetites during the long Infancy of our Reason. The Condition of human Nature is such, that Knowledge can be acquired only by slow Degrees: It is founded originally in Experience; and Experience must be the Work of Time. But the Passions and Appetites, having their Foundation in Nature, exert themselves immediately in full Force: They require nothing more than proper Objects to raise them; which, in this great Variety of Things, will be ever ready. These are capable indeed of being rightly directed, and kept within proper Bounds: But, as this cannot be done without a right Apprehension of Things, the Weakness of Reason will ever contribute to the Strength of Passion. Hence it comes to pass, that, before we are qualified to direct ourselves, bad Habits have got Possession of us; and settle in us a sort of Empire, not to be overthrown without extraordinary Vigour and Resolution. If indeed it happens (as sometimes it does), that these

436 S E R M O N XV.

Passions are watched and controuled by those who direct our Youth,—the greatest Difficulties of Virtue are gotten over, and a Preparation made for moral Improvement hereafter. Yet it must be considered, that some things will escape the nicest Observation ;—some little Errors in Temper will insensibly grow upon us,—give us an unhappy Turn,—and, in Time, become the Principles of an uncertain and irregular Conduct : So that, when all things are laid together, it can be no Matter of Surprize, if even the best Men, *as the wise Virgins represented in the Gospel, while the Bridegroom tarrieth, do slumber and sleep.*

The Consideration of this would fill us with Terror, were we not in the Hands of a gracious and merciful Being ;---of one whose Compassion is as remarkable as his Purity,---and who will make Allowances for the Infirmities we labour under : But then it should be remembered, at the same time, that we must not carry this Matter too far, nor plead our Weakness in excuse for our Negligence. If we cannot always do as we would, we must yet do as much as we can ; *We must keep our Lamps burning, and carry Oil in our Vessels ;* and be ready, upon the very
first

S E R M O N XV. 437

first Alarm, *to go forth and meet the Bridegroom.*

I shall now proceed to the several Points of Instruction, which the Consideration of the foregoing Doctrine suggests to us. These principally concern our Conduct, either in reference to other Men, or to ourselves.

The First Point we should learn, is this; Not to be over-severe in censuring the Conduct of other Men. It becomes us to be cautious in this regard, because, not knowing the whole State of Things, we cannot always affirm for certain what is really good or bad; and because, in many Cases, a Thing, wrong in itself, may, on account of the Circumstances attending it, be entirely innocent in the Doer. But these Cases do not belong to the present Consideration. I am here to suppose the Thing ill, and the Actor culpable: Yet still it should be remembered, that we know too little of the inward State and Condition of the Man to determine precisely in what Degree he is to be censured or excused. Different Men labour under different Degrees of moral Infirmary; and therefore, in that View of the Matter, the very same Actions will be differently estimated by the All-wise Judge of Things. It is plain we

438 S E R M O N XV.

may err in our Judgment of these Matters ; and therefore we should be reserved and cautious :---Or if it could be supposed, that the Whole of Things were open to us ;--- that we knew how far human Infirmary might go ;---and, by reflecting on our own Weaknesses, were thoroughly apprised of other Mens : Even in this Case it would become us to be as tender of others, as we are of ourselves ; ---and to compassionate their Errors as readily as we excuse our own. This is the least which ought to be concluded from the Sense of our own moral Infirmary.

We should learn, in the next place, by no Actions of ours to lay Temptations in the Way of other Men. We have considered, in some measure, the moral Infirmary of human Nature. As this is Matter of the highest Concern, and what every serious Person must lament,---it becomes us surely not to make too dangerous Experiments upon it. To do so, is like the setting Fire to Matter combustible ; in which Case, though the Persons more immediately concerned may be the first and principal Sufferers, yet equal Judges will lay no small Share of Blame on us : We shall become *Partakers in other Mens Sins*, when we command them by our Authority,---encourage

S E R M O N XV. 439

courage them by our Countenance,---or lead to them by our Example.

But such high Instances as these are open and direct Breaches upon Virtue: They are of themselves highly criminal;--from which, if we are not discouraged on their own account, we can scarce hope the Influence they may have on the Conduct of others, will be of any Weight with us. Bad Men are not to be led by Considerations of this kind; and therefore I leave them, as Persons I have no Concern with here. But what I have principally in View, is this; That we ought to be watchful over that Part of our Conduct which may not be directly criminal. What is innocent in private, may be mischievous in public; in those Cases at least where weaker Brethren are the Spectators,—and apt to be led, by the indiscrete Use of our Liberty, to sin against God. *St. Paul* hath furnished us with Instances of this kind; but, at the same time, he hath taught us how to behave by his own Example: For the Rule he set himself was this; *If Meat make my Brother to offend, I will eat no Flesh whilst the World standeth, lest I make my Brother to offend.*

To advance a Step farther: The Doctrine considered is a strong Motive to use our best

440 S E R M O N XV.

Endeavours, whether to preserve Men in their Innocence, or to reclaim them from their Sins. Our Condition, in the best View we can take it, is dangerous enough: The Assaults made on our Virtue are vigorous; and our Powers of resisting them, are, God knows, feeble. All Assistances therefore are necessary; and as Men may be mutually serviceable to one another in this great Affair, so it concerns them to embrace every Opportunity of being so. See the Direction which our Apostle gives us in reference to this Point; *Exhort one another daily, whilst it is called To-day, lest any of you be hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin.* There are Two Considerations to the present Purpose of singular Moment: The one, that our Endeavouring to secure the Virtue and Religion of our Brethren, is a doing the greatest Honour to God; — the other, that it promotes the highest Interest and Happiness of Men. It is the best Evidence we can possibly give of our own inward Religion and Benevolence; and if we are not affected by this Consideration, I must confess, I know none others more likely to work on a serious and generous Mind.

Besides what hath been already noted, there are other Matters of Instruction in reference

S E R M O N X V. 441

ference to ourselves, which the Doctrine before insisted on suggests to us. As,

I. We should learn from hence to be modest and humble ; not to depend too much on our own Abilities, — nor to value ourselves too highly on our own Performances. We have seen already the infirm Condition of human Nature ; --- how little we are capable of doing by our own mere Strength ; and, consequently, how much we ought to distrust ourselves. In some Matters we are ignorant ; — if our Duty lies open to us, yet the Motives to discharge it are out of View ; — or, if these appear in full Force, yet possibly we may not be so well acquainted with the several Means which facilitate Duty by preparing the Way to it ; --- or, if all these Things are known, yet it may happen, that we are heedless and inattentive, — unapt to reflect, and to bring forth our habitual Knowledge upon emergent Occasions : And, after all, how fortunate soever we may prove as to the foregoing Particulars, we frequently want that Vigour of Mind, and Firmness of Resolution, which is necessary to carry us through with Honour. The Result is plainly this ; We should live in a constant Dependence on the All-good Being, — and implore his Assistance in proportion to our Want of it.

There

442 S E R M O N XV.

There is One thing farther to be noted here ; namely, When we perform any thing well, we ought not to claim the Honour of it to ourselves, — but ascribe it (where it is most justly due) to that merciful Being who assisted us in performing it. This follows directly from what was just before observed : For, if we labour under such moral Imperfection as makes the Divine Assistance necessary, then the Success we meet with in our spiritual Affairs, must be owing not so much to ourselves as God : And if to act without a Dependence on the Supreme Being is justly to be esteemed Rashness, — to value ourselves too highly on the Excellency of our Performances is Insolence.

We may go on, and observe farther, that as the Imperfection of our present State is an Argument for our Humility, so is it likewise a proper Consideration to enforce on us a double Watchfulness and Diligence. Were our Condition such as rendered us secure against all Assaults, somewhat might be said in Excuse for our Negligence ; — or rather, on such a Supposition, all the Care we might take were needless. But since we are surrounded by numberless Temptations, and yet so weakly fortified within, — we must make up by Diligence what is wanting in Strength,
and

S E R M O N XV. 443

and keep the Enemy at as great a Distance as possible. The Christian Course is resembled to a Warfare, in which Art supplies the Room of Force,—and the Conquest depends as much on the Activity as the Strength of the Warrior. It becomes us therefore to take the Measures of our Conduct from hence; and to pursue the great Affairs of Eternity with the same prudent Zeal, as others do a temporal Conquest, and a fading Crown of Glory.

I would observe, in the Last place, the great Expediency of Self-denial. Our moral Imperfection, we have seen, is founded in the Greatness of Temptations,—the Strength of our Appetites,—and our Weakness in resisting them. All Methods therefore must be exceedingly proper, which may serve either to keep Temptations at a Distance,—or to abate the Force of our inward Desires,—or to improve our own moral Powers. Now the Expedient proposed is of the highest Moment in the present Case, as it serves all these Ends alike, and is not confined to any one Particular, exclusive of the rest. Thus, as to the former: Whilst the Method proposed implies not only our keeping within the Bounds of Duty, but our retiring at as great
a Distance

444 S E R M O N XV.

a Distance as possible from Sin,----a Contradicting our very Desires, and an Abstaining from Things even in themselves innocent ;---if it does not entirely destroy Temptations, it keeps us out of the Way of them : And, without Question, in all Cases where the Victory may be doubtful, we are concerned as much as possible to decline the Combat.

Nor is this all : Supposing we should notwithstanding be assaulted (and this we can hardly avoid, on all Occasions, whilst surrounded by so many engaging Objects), yet the Temptations themselves will have less Influence on us, whilst our Desires are kept under Rule. We should consider Self-denial as a Course of Discipline ; not intended to grieve and afflict us,---but to train us up to Virtue ;---to keep our Appetites and Passions low ;---and to give Reason the more absolute Command over them. A little Practice this Way will shew of what mighty Consequence it is to render us indifferent to those Objects of Sense, which are apt to have the greatest Influence upon us.

I shall note One thing more, and have done : The Method insisted on will farther conduce to improve our own moral Powers : It will give Room for the Advancement of

S E R M O N XV. 445

our Reason ; it will enlarge our Knowledge, both of Duty and Motives ;—and render us more quick in the Discernment of proper Means : It will habituate us to Attention, and, in that Way, make the most irksome Part of our intellectual Conduct pleasant : Lastly, it will strengthen our Resolution by weakening Discouragements, or keeping them out of View.

Upon the whole, and to conclude : Notwithstanding the Infirmities we labour under, there is none Occasion to despair : The *wise Virgins*, though they *slumbered and slept*, were yet awakened by the Mercy of Providence : The same Providence watches over us for Good, being equally tender of us ; and therefore, if we pursue carefully those important Instructions which the Sense of our Infirmary suggests to us, our *Labours will not be in vain*, but *God's Strength will be made perfect in Weakness*.

S E R-

the British; it will, I think, be found
that the British are not so much
interested in the Disarmament of
Europe as we will be. We will be
interested in the Disarmament of
Europe in the way that the British
are not. We will be interested in
the Disarmament of Europe in the
way that the British are not.

I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Yours truly,
J. B. M. O. N. Y.

THE SECRETARY OF THE
ARMY AND NAVA
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WHITE HALL
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SERMON XVI.

Human Life a State of Pilgrimage.

HEB. xi. 13.

And confessed, that they were Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth.

THE Words now read have an immediate Reference to *Abraham*, and those eminent Persons, who, descending from him, imitated his Faith and Virtue, and depended for their Reward on another better State of Things. These, tho' born in this World, were not properly of it: They did not consider themselves as Citizens here, and Persons whose whole Interest was confined to the present Life; but rather, as occasional and temporary Inhabitants, who, passing through this World, were only travelling

448 S E R M O N XVI.

velling on to another. *These all died in Faith, not having received the Promises, but having seen them afar off; and were persuaded of them, and embraced them; and confessed, that they were Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth.*

Indeed there was something particular in the Case of *Abraham*, and of his Descendants likewise, till their Settlement in the Land of *Canaan*: For these having no fixed Abode, were, in the strictest Sense of the Word, Pilgrims. This Circumstance, the more eminent amongst them improved to the best Advantage, by acting agreeably to it, — by weaning themselves from the World, — by fixing their chief Thoughts on a better, and directing their Aims to that State of Happiness which God intended for them hereafter.

But whatever Particularity there may have been in the Case of the good Men here referred to, yet there is enough of a similar Kind, in the Condition of every Man living, to shew, that this Expression may be considered as a Representation of human Life. We also *are Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth*. Though, in the common Account of Things, we may be thought *settled*, as having Possessions ensured to us by the strongest

S E R M O N XVI. 449

strongest worldly Ensurances, yet even these are, upon many Accounts, precarious; The real Enjoyment and Taste of them at least must be so; and the Tenure itself being short, we must give way to some new Possessors. All the Reflections therefore which the good Patriarchs formerly made, may be as properly made by us; and our State being in a great Degree the same, our Duties resulting from this State, must be the same likewise.

In the farther Prosecution of this Subject, I shall,

First, Illustrate and confirm the Point here suggested, That human Life is a State of Pilgrimage. And then,

Secondly, Shew what Matters of Instruction may be drawn from this important Representation.

In order to the more distinct Explication of the Point before us, it may be proper to consider, what the human Constitution is. From thence will appear what ~~must~~ be the End of this Constitution. By comparing this with the State and Condition of the World, we shall discern how far this End

450 S E R M O N XVI.

can be answered in the present Life. If, from the Suitableness of these to each other, this End is completely attainable in this World, it may seem probable, that Man was intended for nothing farther: But if it shall prove otherwise, and this End, though capable of being promoted in some measure, yet cannot be fully answered here, we shall be obliged to carry our Thoughts farther: We must presume, that another more perfect State of Things is prepared for us; — that the present Life is but probationary; — and that we are only travelling through this World to a better.

If Man be considered merely as to his animal Capacity, we find him fitted for those Enjoyments, of which the Senses furnish out Materials, drawn from the several Objects which surround him. In this respect he is on the same Foot with other Animals, who have a Relation only to this World: But when we view him in another more advantageous Light, as endued with rational Powers, his Case is greatly different. Hence he is not only capable of perceiving Truth, and of forming to himself a proper Rule of Action, but likewise of those more refined Pleasures, which result from a just Attention

to

S E R M O N XVI. 451

to both : He is able to contemplate and adore the great Author of Things, — to obey his Laws, — to render himself every Day more and more acceptable to him ; and, in consequence of this, he is strongly induced to hope for such Rewards as vastly exceed any thing which this World can bestow.

From this View of the human Constitution, we must conclude, that Man, although born in this World, and capable of subsisting in it, in some sort, yet must have been intended for something greater : His Powers fit him for the Pursuit of something nobler than this World can propose to him ; his Desires are pointed to something beyond it ; and his Expectations that Way, even without the Benefit of Revelation, are urgent and strong.

The real State of his Case is this : As consisting of both Body and Mind, he hath a certain Connexion with both Worlds ; — with this, as relative to his animal Constitution ; — and with another, where the rational Part shall be perfected, after having taken the several preparatory Steps which may fit it for that nobler Habitation : So that, whilst we live in this World, being Expectants of a better, we are, as it were, out of our proper

452 S E R M O N XVI.

Place : Our chief Business here, is to prosecute an Interest elsewhere : Our Condition, on this account, is very fitly represented by that of a Pilgrim or Traveller, who is pressing on to another Country, to which he is bound, and where his chief Concerns lie.

As this is a very interesting Subject, it will not be improper to pursue it more distinctly.

And here the First thing, which the Consideration of human Life, as a State of Pilgrimage, implies, is this ; That we are not designed to live in this World for ever. The least Reflection on our animal Frame, must evince this Point : We are compounded of very frail Materials : The human Body, as being vastly delicate and curious, must of course be subject to a Variety of Disorders ; some arising from internal Principles, and others from Ten thousand Accidents which surround us : We feel this, from the Beginning of our Existence, in such a manner, that even Life itself may be termed by us a continued State of Dying : And whilst we experience, in our own Persons, a continual Approach towards Death, are we not more strongly reminded of our Mortality by daily Instances of those who drop off before us ?—

Of

S E R M O N XVI. 453

Of Persons dropping off in every Stage of Life; and thereby teaching us, not only that we are mortal, but that Life itself is short and precarious?

Let me not, however, be here mistaken. I do not suggest this in the Way of necessary Proof; for who wants a Proof of this Point? What I design, is rather to impress on your Minds a quick Sense of your Mortality, than merely the Belief of it.

Nor let us deceive ourselves by reflecting, that some Instances occur of Persons, who draw Life out to a greater Length: For, can we promise ourselves the same Advantage, if an Advantage it be? Or, if we could, still Life must end one Time or other: And when it doth so, what will it import us that we have lived so long?—That we have passed perhaps a considerable Part of our Time, weakened both in Body and Mind,—and in a State, though not of absolute Death, yet an intermediate one (as it may be called) between Life and Death.

In truth, the whole of our Existence in this World, that can to any Purpose be called Life, is that, in which we are capable of answering the Design of Living;—it is that in which we are capable of acting the Part assigned us,

454 S E R M O N XVI.

—of knowing what we ought to do, and of behaving accordingly ; —and thereby recommending ourselves to the Favour of that All-gracious Being who placed us here.

If we do so, we see our Reward before us ; —a better Country, —a more distinguished Condition, —and a Possession which shall last for ever.

When we consider, that the Attainment of this Possession was the original and great Design of God in creating us ; —that he placed us in this World, and endued us with our several Powers, that we might, by a right Use of them, be fitted for a Removal to a much happier Place : We must see how aptly this State of ours is represented by a Pilgrimage ; which, in its most obvious Notion, imports (as was hinted before) a kind of hasty Passage through a Country, not properly our own, to another where our greater and more important Concerns lie.

I would observe, in the next place, from the Consideration of Life, as a State of Pilgrimage, that, whilst we continue in this World, it must be expected that our Condition will be various and uncertain ; mixed with Good and Evil ; —a Condition, in which there is so much Good as will serve to support

S E R M O N XVI. 455

port us under the Evil,---and so much Evil as will qualify and abate the Sense of Good.

This is a State of Things which every Traveller must expect to meet with. Things cannot be entirely to his Mind in a Place not prepared to suit it,---where he hath not Time to accommodate every thing to his own Taste; and where it would be improper, in some sort, to do so, were it within his own Power.

There is no absolute Happiness to be enjoyed in this Life: Those who hold it longest, are generally most tired of it: Its greatest Entertainments are low and unsatisfactory;--even those, I mean, which are in themselves innocent, and embittered by no Remorse of Conscience: Or, be they what they will, yet by what kind of Tenure do we possess them? Are we exposed to no Uncertainties?---Are we secure of holding what we happen, by some good Fortune, to procure? Or, if dispossessed, are we not apt to be affected in a great Degree?---A greater than the Loss of such Things properly deserves. Disquiets enough there must be of this kind.

But our Condition must appear to be much less favourable, when we consider to what a Variety of other Evil we are exposed;---of

456 S E R M O N XVI.

Evil real, and truly grievous; and which will require a good Measure both of Reason and Fortitude to support us under it.

All this cannot be otherwise, according to the present Constitution of Things: For, tho' it was the Divine Intention in framing this World to produce Good, and to promote Happiness, yet this rather respects the Interest of the whole, than that of particular Persons; and the Quantity of Good intended, must be such as corresponds to the End designed by the Creation, and the Relation which this World bears to another. Let us consider then, that the Laws which prevail, though the best that could be contrived for the Advantage of the whole System, may however, on special Occasions, prove unfriendly; on those, for Instance, where Vice or Folly shall give a wrong Direction to them, and make them produce Effects untoward. In such Cases, some must suffer; and as this frequently happens, it is impossible but everyone, some time or other, must feel it more or less.

But can it be expected, that these Rules should be altered in order to obviate Difficulties of this Kind? What then must become of the Whole, whose Interest would be subverted

S E R M O N XVI. 457

subverted on this Foot? And what must become of the general Interests even of particular Persons, who, notwithstanding they do sometimes suffer by these Means, yet owe to them, at the same time, the best and most substantial Advantages which they enjoy.

The Truth of the Case is this: The present World was never intended to be the Seat of complete Happiness: It was designed to be a Place, not of Abode, but of Passage; and in this View it is so constituted as to answer every valuable Purpose: It is furnished with so much Good, as will support us in our Journey, and enable us to go through with Comfort: But this Good is so qualified by the Mixture of Evil, that a thinking Man can have no Temptation to set his Heart upon it, nor to abate his Desires of that better State of Things which is designed hereafter.

In passing through Life we must expect therefore, as other Travellers are wont to do;---we must expect, I say, to find some bad Roads,---some unfavourable Weather,---and, in some Places, poor, or even miserable Accommodations. But how do real Travellers behave under such Circumstances? Do they sit down and lament the Unhappiness of
their

458 S E R M O N XVI.

thir Condition, without ever attempting to get out of it? Rather, do they not endeavour to the utmost to conquer such Difficulties? Do they not endeavour to raise their Spirits by the Prospect of a smother Way,---of a fairer Season,---and of more comfortable Provisions? They reason with themselves that the Good and the Bad must be taken together;---that whilst they are on a Journey, they are concerned to make the best of it;---and if Things turn out worse than ordinary, they are only on a Journey; they shall have finished it in a little Time; and then the very Difficulties they have gone through, will quicken their Relish of succeeding Enjoyments.

This leads me to a Third Point, which the Consideration of Life, as a State of Pilgrimage, implies; *viz.* That our Being is not to be extinguished by Death; that we are to go into another Country, which is properly our own,---and where we shall fix our long and everlasting Abode.

Here I shall not step out of my Way distinctly, and by all its several Arguments, to prove a Doctrine, which is supposed by every Form of Religion, and the Belief of which is, in some sort, natural to the Mind of Man.

This

S E R M O N XVI. 459

This therefore I take for granted ; and shall only apply it for the more full Explication of the Matter before us.

Were there no Hereafter, then the present World, as being our All, would challenge our whole Concern : We should have nothing to do but to make the most of it ;—to procure and improve its Advantages ; and to avoid, or abate, the Evils of it. On such a Foot there would be some Sense in that Maxim of the Sensualist ; *Let us eat and drink, for To-morrow we die* ; at least whilst Men acted with some sort of Discretion, and did not, by the Irregular Pursuit of Pleasure, defeat the End of it.

But, on another Supposition, the Case is vastly altered. If there be an active Principle within us different in Nature from the Body, which it actuates ;—if this Principle be so far independent on the Body, as to be capable of subsisting without it ;—if it be farther capable of Pleasures or Pains superior to any of those which are conveyed to us by the bodily Organs ;—and if we have all possible Reason to persuade ourselves, that this Principle will subsist hereafter in another Place, and in a very different State ; then we are certainly concerned to look about us ;—to provide,

460 S E R M O N XVI.

provide, as well as we can, for that important State of Things, which, succeeding the present, is the State to which the great Aims, even of the present, should be directed;—should be directed, I say, if any thing we can here perform, will serve to better our Condition hereafter.

Now this is the real State of the Matter: Religion, where-ever professed, hath constantly taught it; and the human Mind, whether cultivated or otherwise, hath been ready to admit it. What greater Assurance can we wish for on this Subject?

But if this World, with its several Advantages and Opportunities, is capable of advancing our Interests in another, then, I think, I may safely take a Step farther, and maintain, that this World should be considered by us none otherwise than as our First Stage of Existence, subservient to, and preparatory for, another; or, in other Words, that our Passage through it should ever be considered as the Journey of Life; the End of which (if we perform it as we ought) will land us safely in a much better Place than what we now inhabit.

The Apostle tells us, *We have here no abiding City, but we seek one to come.* [Heb.

xiii.

S E R M O N XVI. 461

xiii. 14.] Because this is no abiding City,---no Place of long Residence, it concerns us to look farther : We are naturally disposed to do so ; for our Desires of Happiness are infinite : And God hath implanted no Desires in us, without some correspondent Object to gratify them.

Infinite, I say, are our Desires of Happiness : Infinite likewise are our Desires of Existence, without which no Happiness can be enjoyed. This future State therefore will be eternal ;---to be continued through Millions of Ages, to which other Millions shall still succeed ; and when these are passed, we shall be as far removed from any End of this State as ever. Here then we are to live for ever : Here we are to fix,---if we chuse to fix ourselves in this Place : Hither are we destined by the All-gracious Author of our Being : And the Attainment of this State is put within our own Reach by the Directions he hath given us,---by the Powers with which he hath endued us,---and by the Assistances he is pleased to afford us.

And what is now the Consequence ? This, surely ; That the Heaven, prepared for us, is our own proper Country : It is ours by Divine Destination ; and it will be most assuredly

462 S E R M O N XVI.

surely possessed by us, if we duly seek it.

Nor is it any Objection to this, that the Title we have is capable of being lost. The same happens in other similar Cases, without any Impeachment of the Title itself. No Advantages in civil Life, however properly our own, are indefeasible: We may lose them by undue Behaviour, or by breaking through the Conditions under which such Advantages are held. So is it with respect to our Interests in another World: They are our own whilst we chuse to make them such; certainly to be secured by a proper Conduct on our Part, and as certainly lost by an improper one. Thus, agreeably to the Representation in the Text, in order to arrive to our proper Place, we must direct our Journey rightly; we must chuse the Road which leads to it; we must cast about for proper Resting-places; and take in all the Aids which may contribute to the successful Prosecution of our Design. On any other Foot, we shall never come to our Journey's End; but rather, by going backward (as the Case may sometimes happen), we shall find ourselves farther removed from that Point than ever. Prudence and Resolution therefore must be necessary
on

S E R M O N XVI. 463

on this Occasion ; and the End proposed must be always prosecuted by Means answerable to this End.

The Sum of what hath been hitherto advanced on the foregoing Representation, is this ; That we were never intended to continue in this World for ever ;---That our Life here, though spun out to its greatest Length, is of short Duration ; and when we drop off, we are forgotten :---That during this short Life, we experience a great Variety of Condition ; sometimes we are (in the World's Account) happy, sometimes unhappy ; the one State balancing the other in such a Manner, as to make Life, upon the whole, and without some farther Reference, a thing little desirable by a serious and thinking Person. ---But can we imagine, that God hath intended for us nothing farther ? By no means. We are assured, that the present Life is but the Infancy of a Being to be extended thro' infinite Ages ; and that the present World is the Place in which we are to prepare ourselves for the Enjoyment of a better. In this View, even the present Life is a Matter of Importance ; for the Issues of Eternity depend on it. Let this be considered, and then we shall neither be uneasy in Life, nor afraid of Death ; but, being supported by Hope, shall be car-

464 S E R M O N XVI.

ried through a Course of uninterrupted Duty, till we come to possess the Happiness we hope for.

II. I am now, under my Second general Head, to shew what Matters of Instruction may be drawn from the foregoing Representation of human Life. And,

I. We should from hence learn to be content with that Portion of Good, which Providence thinks fit to grant us.

In the Course of my Reflections on the general Subject, it hath been noted, that a Mixture of Good and Evil is the Condition of human Life ;---that the Good permitted us to enjoy is slight, whilst the Evil we suffer is affecting : And though we should suppose much more to the Advantage of Good than Matter of Fact will justify, yet this is so qualified by some Ill proportioned to it, that the Whole carries with it very little desirable. Upon this State of Things, some have, with a Shew of Reason at least, supposed, that the Generality of Mankind do enjoy or suffer much the same ;---or, if you please, that, upon the whole, there is no considerable Difference, as to the Degrees of Happiness in different Men.

If

S E R M O N XVI. 465

If this be true, then what doth it signify how, or in what Manner, we are provided for in this Life; whether we act an higher or lower Part, or possess ourselves of more or less? If all will come out much the same at last, surely we should content ourselves with the Portion allotted us; and not render ourselves, by our own senseless Uneasiness, less happy than we might have been by Contentment in the Beginning.

And yet I dare not say, that the Advantages of Life, when they come fairly in our Way, should be rejected. In such a Case, they are the Offers which God himself makes us. As such they should be received with Thankfulness, and employed for those Purposes for which they were bestowed: But, if it shall please God to withhold such Advantages, or to afford us a less Proportion than falls to the Lot of others,---this should give us no great Concern: We may go thro' Life reasonably well notwithstanding; especially considering, that as Nature requires but a little, so the Time we are to continue here is but short;---and a very few Years will make it just the same thing, whether we possessed more or less.

But the most important Enforcement of

466 S E R M O N XVI

Contentment is behind, and arises from the Reference which this World hath to another. When we consider it only as a Place of Passage, we may surely satisfy ourselves with the Enjoyment of that which is sufficient for our Passage: More, perhaps, might be an Incumbrance. It may happen, that we are not fitted for the Management of great Concerns;—at least consistently with the Design of our Existence here, and with the Practice of our several Duties under the particular Circumstances which attend us. Some have behaved well in an inferior Station, who might not have acted reputably in an higher; and as God knows what is fit for us much better than we ourselves do, it is much better for us that he should direct our Fortunes, than that we should make the Choice for ourselves.

After all, be this as it will, yet when we consider, that the present Life is but an infinitely small Portion of a Duration never to be ended;—and that the greatest Enjoyments of it are in no way to be compared with those which shall be manifested in us hereafter, how trifling must such Enjoyments appear;—how little to be coveted;—how heartily to be despised!

S E R M O N XVI. 467

2. A Second Point of Instruction shall be this; We should learn, from what hath been advanced, to be moderate in our Enjoyment of the several Advantages which we possess.

Every Power we enjoy is capable of being directed right or wrong; and every Object of these Powers may be applied, either in a proper Way, or otherwise. The Advantages of Life are not therefore always Blessings: They will prove such no farther, than we ourselves are disposed to make them so;---Blessings, if we use them rightly; but Curses, if we pervert and abuse them.

But, what then, it may be demanded, are we to esteem the right and proper Use of these Advantages? The principal and most concerning is this; To make them subservient to our spiritual Interests,---and to lay them out, as Opportunity offers, in Works of Piety and Mercy.

Still this doth not reach the Matter before me, which concerns not the Distribution of our Advantages in favour of others, but our own personal Enjoyment of them. Now this should be with Temperance and Moderation: And the general Doctrine before us will be singularly useful for that Purpose.

468 S E R M O N XVI.

That we ought not to take any Satisfaction in them at all, may indeed be inculcated by some sour Enthusiasts, who forget at once both the Constitution of our Nature, and the Designs of Providence : But sober Religion is a Stranger to such Austerities as sober Reason must condemn.

Yet, though these Advantages were given us to be enjoyed, they should still be enjoyed reasonably ;---not to the full Extent of our bodily Desires ; for this Reason itself forbids. Mere animal Desire, in Man at least, is boundless ; and, upon that account, Reason was given him to controul it.

Admitting, therefore, that the Enjoyments of this World are, in some sort, permitted us ;---yet we should not indulge ourselves in them too far : We should not, in the Use of them, either injure our Health, or impair our Reason ;---or, by attending to them too closely, lessen any of our own moral Powers. To do so, is to forget the Situation we are in : It is to forget that this World hath a Reference to another ; and that, during the short Time we are to continue here, we are principally concerned to make every thing as conducive as we can, to a future, much more important, Interest.

To

S E R M O N XVI. 469

To speak truly, one might scarce think it possible, that a Man, who hath any Sense of his present Situation,---of the great Happiness in Prospect, and of the little he is capable of enjoying at present, should ever be diverted by mere Amusements from prosecuting his eternal Concerns. If a Man do but consider this attentively, the Effect of it must of course follow.

3. I pass on to a Third Article of Instruction; *viz.* We should from hence learn Patience under the several Inconveniencies and Misfortunes we may endure.

What hath been already noted, that a Mixture of Good and Evil is the Condition of human Life, will have its proper Effect here; because, if this be our Condition, we are as much concerned to bear the Evil decently, as to receive the Good thankfully. To do this, as really concerns our Interest in this Life as in the next.

But perhaps many of the Evils we labour under are of our own creating;---perhaps they are owing to our own wrong Estimates of Things, or to our own irregular Conduct. If this prove the Case, ought we not, instead of fretting under the Evils we have occasioned, to correct our own bad Measures; and

470 S E R M O N XVI.

endeavour to repair our Condition by a wiser Management for the future? In this Manner doth the Traveller proceed, who having mistaken his Way, and gone out of his proper Road, sits not down to complain of his Misfortune; but having seen his Error,---the Effect of which he feels,---finds it proper to set Things at rights before it becomes too late to do so.

Supposing, however, the Evils we suffer are, in a great Degree, independent of ourselves, and the Effects of Things out of our Command, yet still let us consider, that, as every Good we enjoy in Life is qualified by some Proportion of Ill, so every Ill we suffer is abated by some Enjoyment of Good: And the Reflection which *Job* made on the Occasion, was pious and reasonable; *Shall we receive Good from the Hand of God, and shall we not receive Evil?* [*Job* ii. 10.]

This Circumstance of Things is quite suitable to the very End for which we were sent into the World: For, agreeably to the Doctrine before advanced, this is not a Place of Enjoyment, but of Preparation for Enjoyments to be had hereafter. Afflictions then may, and ought to be, considered by us as Matters of Discipline and Trial; as what af-

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S E R M O N XVI. 471

ford us Opportunities of exercising several Virtues, which cannot be exercised in any other Condition; and as highly useful,---in some sort necessary, both to fix our Attention to a better State of Things, and to quicken our Relish of it, when it shall become hereafter our Possession.

After all, without taking any of the foregoing Considerations into account, let us suppose the Evils we endure in Life however severe; yet it seldom happens, that they are so severe but we are able to bear them. If otherwise, they must soon end in the Dissolution of Life: And who would not exert himself to the utmost, in prospect of being so soon relieved?---But, if we may bear them, I am sure we ought to do so; not only as they are the Inflictions of Providence, but likewise as they are mercifully intended by it as the very Way to Happiness. Let us hear what *St. Paul* declares to this purpose; *Our present light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us an eternal and more exceeding Weight of Glory.* [2 Cor. iv. 17.]

4. We should learn farther, from the foregoing Doctrine, to be strictly circumspect in our whole Conduct and Behaviour. This indeed results not only from the Doctrine in

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general,

472 S E R M O N XVI.

general, but from every Part which belongs to it ;--from considering the Good we enjoy, --the Evil we suffer,--the Work we are about, ---and the great End we aim at.

As to the Good which we enjoy in Life, though none of it depends entirely on ourselves, yet it ought not to be denied, that our own Conduct may influence it in a great Degree ;---may contribute towards the obtaining it,---towards the securing it when obtained,---towards the increasing or lessening it when in Possession,---and the directing it rightly for those Purposes for which it was bestowed upon us. Virtue, and Diligence, and Caution, are needful here ; in which, if we fail, we can blame no one but ourselves.

But the most important Point relates to the Use and Application of this Good : For it may be turned either to our Advantage or Disservice ;--to our Advantage, by promoting the Interests of Virtue,--or to our Disservice, by interrupting that wise Course which might lead us to our proper End. How much then are we concerned to watch over ourselves ;---to restrain our Desires, and to moderate our Enjoyments ; and whilst we think *we stand, to take heed lest we fall* [1 Cor. x. 12.]

The

S E R M O N XVI. 473

The same Circumspection likewise is necessary with regard to the Evils we are exposed to. These may, in some measure, be prevented or abated by us, if we duly attend to our Condition; and in the same Way that the Good before-mentioned may be obtained or secured: But will an Indifference or Carelessness about what happens to us, effect this? Can we hope to avoid, what we use no Endeavour to avoid? Or, if it happen to befall us, can we support ourselves under it without such a Measure of Consideration, as shall supply us with proper Motives for this Purpose?

Or, to take a Step farther, can we, without considering the Whole of Things, make a proper Use of the Afflictions which we suffer? God doth not deal by us arbitrarily, or without regard to the highest Reason. This holds, especially as to the Infliction of Evil. He afflicts us therefore for wise Purposes; and these Purposes we are concerned to attend to. But this cannot be done without a constant Watchfulness, as well over ourselves, as the several Accidents which await us.

Let us go on, and see how the same Conclusion arises, from considering the Work we are about. This is of a very extensive Nature,

474 S E R M O N XVI.

ture, and comprehends the Whole of right Behaviour in our present Situation. Various therefore must it be of course, in proportion to the various Circumstances of Action. But beside the Difficulties from hence arising, which demand our perpetual Attention, we should consider what Temptations do constantly solicit us ;---Temptations, some of them springing up within ourselves,---some of them occasioned by the Objects which surround us,---and some of them suggested to us by envious and malicious Beings. In such a Circumstance of Danger, where we are so apt to miscarry, and where our Miscarriage may be so fatal, we cannot be too much on our Guard ; and we are concerned surely to be heedful of every thing we act in *this* Life, since it hath such a commanding Influence on our Happiness in another.

This Happiness is the great End we aim at ; and the Consideration of this End is a farther Enforcement of Circumspection : For, is it possible we can have in View our Fate to all Eternity,---an Interest in comparison with which all other Interests are as nothing,---and not be solicitous for the Event ?

In little Matters an Indifference may be excused ; Or, where a wrong Step may be repaired,

S E R M O N X V L 475

repaired, the having taken it may be pardonable upon our endeavouring to repair it : But the Case is otherwise here. All depends upon our present Behaviour. This Life is our only State of Trial, and the next of Retribution. What therefore can be done but once, should be well and carefully done ; because, if we are now found negligent, we shall in vain repent such Neglect for ever.

5. I am directly led from hence to observe one farther Matter of Instruction, which the Doctrine before us suggests ; viz. Since we are Pilgrims only in this World, we should keep constantly in our Mind that better Country, to which we are hastening.

What that Country is precisely, — how it is furnished, — what will be our Entertainments there, — and in what Manner we ourselves shall be fitted to enjoy them ; these are Secrets to us at present. We, who have never experienced any thing of that Happiness, can form of it no distinct Notion ; and, in truth, are incapable of having it conveyed to us in any natural Way : And yet, that it is Great, — vastly beyond any thing we can here experience, is
Matter

476 S E R M O N XVI.

Matter of Certainty ; for it is the Completion of all that is valuable,---the End of every thing else ; and therefore must infinitely exceed it.

In this Way of considering the Matter, how can it be expected, that we should comprehend this Happiness ? For, if what we distinctly know be from Experience ; ---and if the Happiness we at present experience be inconsiderable, --- the future would be less important, were we capable of knowing what it is. The not knowing it therefore, under the present Circumstances, should heighten our Desires, and animate our Endeavours, and engage to it our strictest Attention.

It is observed in Scripture, concerning the more mysterious Way of Providence, that the very *Angels desire to look into it.* [1 Pet. i. 12.] Beings of more enlarged Capacities, and more inflamed Affections, than we are. They desire to look into it ; because, though difficult to be discerned distinctly, yet there is in it such a Treasure of consummate Wisdom, as must amply deserve the Search. May we not say the same concerning the State of Things in the other World ? Though our Curiosity,

S E R M O N XVI. 477

osity, as to Particulars, cannot be fully satisfied, yet may not this Curiosity be ever from hence excited? Doth not the very Scripture itself engage our Attention by some lively and affecting Representations? — One while by that of a *Kingdom even of Glory*, — and at another by that of *Rivers of Pleasure, which flow at God's Right-hand for evermore?* [*Psalms xvi. 11.*] And yet to assure us that Expressions of this Kind fall vastly short of Truth, we are told, in another Place, *That Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, nor hath it entered into the Heart of Man to conceive the Things which God hath laid up for them that love him.* [*1 Cor. ii. 9.*]

If this Happiness then be the End of our Being; — if it was for this that God was pleased to create us; — if our Desires of Happiness be unbounded; — and therefore, since we cannot find it here, what we must aspire after elsewhere, — how should we delight to dwell upon the Thought? — Seize it whenever it offers itself to our Mind? — And, being seized, indulge ourselves in it, without Measure, and without End?

Indeed

478 S E R M O N XVI.

Indeed how can we be induced to part with a Reflection, which must prove to us so exceedingly comfortable at present, and be a kind of Anticipation of that which is to come hereafter? No one can form to himself a Conception of any thing highly agreeable, though merely possible, — much more if probable, — especially if certainly future, but the very Conception must carry with it some Degree even of Happiness: It must heighten our other innocent Pleasures, and qualify all our present Sufferings and render our Passage through Life, not only tolerable, but happy.

This will be more particularly comfortable, when we are just finishing our Course, and drawing near to the End of our Journey. The Eye of Faith will then grow stronger, and make our Prospect clearer. Those upon the Brink of Eternity will see farther into it, than they did, or possibly could, before. The Heaven, which, being formerly at a Distance, was viewed more indistinctly, will brighten upon us as we approach it. We shall see, and, in some sense, feel, it, even before we enter into it. — How gracious hath God been to us
in

S E R M O N XVI. 479

in thus removing the supposed Terrors of
Death, and rendering its very Presence to us
delightful !

Now to God the Father, God the Son,
&c. Amen.

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3 R. M. O. N. 449

In this country, the Republic of
France and Germany is very large to us
and the people of the Republic of France

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SERMON XVII.

ECCLESIASTES i. 2, 3.

— *All is Vanity.*

*What Profit hath a Man of all his Labour
which he taketh under the Sun?*

AS these Words are not the hasty Conclusion of a passionate disappointed Man, but the Result of a thorough Knowledge and Experience, so they deserve our more particular Attention: By a due Regard to them, we shall learn to make right Estimates of Things;----to abate our Desires, and to humble our Pride; and to be rational as well in the Pursuit of what we want, as in the Management of what we enjoy.

But the best and most useful Instruction is often spoiled by a wrong Interpretation. A

VOL. II.

I i

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482 S E R M O N XVII.

Proposition, however true whilst rightly understood, may become a pernicious Error, when carried too far. This holds in most Cases; but especially in the Matter before us.

Thus: Can it be thought, that so wise a Man as *Solomon* would condemn the World entirely, and in every possible View? Could God frame it in such a manner as should upbraid the Wisdom and Goodness of his Creation? Or, can it happen, that a serious Reflector on our Condition in Life, should intend to be understood in such a Sense, as must disappoint all the good Effects of the Instruction he would inculcate?—If not, then it will become us,

I. In the First place, to enquire, With what Restrictions this Proposition should be understood;—*All is Vanity.*

II. This being dispatched, I shall then endeavour to illustrate and confirm the Truth here inculcated. And,

Lastly, apply it to its proper Purposes in some useful Conclusions.

And First then, when it is affirmed, that *all is Vanity*, this must be understood, either of

S E R M O N XVII. 483

of the Things themselves which we pursue or possess,—or else of our own Labour and Conduct in pursuing them. Now it cannot be affirmed *absolutely*, as to either of these, that *all is Vanity*. There is certainly some such thing as Happiness ;—some Object or Cause of it ; and this, whatever it be, cannot be esteemed vain. What therefore is here termed *Vanity*, must be that which we mistake as the Cause of Happiness ;—what either hath no manner of Connection with it, or will prove perhaps the real Parent of Misery.

As, in consequence of this, the Happiness expected in another World cannot be esteemed vain, so neither can those virtuous or religious Actions merit that Title, by which we endeavour to recommend ourselves to the Favour of the Almighty. And though, during the present Imperfection of our moral State, these will be found defective ; yet as they are of themselves in some sort good, and accepted by our merciful Creator, it would be highly injurious to detract from their real Value. And this agrees exactly with the Sentiments of the Wise Man, who concludes his Reflections on human Conduct with this important Advice [*Ecc. xii. 13.*] *Fear God,*

484 S E R M O N XVII.

and keep his Commandments; for this is the Whole of Man. To which may be added the Assurance which *St. Paul* gives us, that *Our Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord* [1 Cor. xv. 58.]

However, what the Wise Man seems to have principally in View, relates to the Things of the present Life, and the Labours of Mankind about them. These he terms *Vanity*. But here likewise he must be understood with Favour; not as absolutely condemning either the Things themselves, or our Pursuits after them;—but only as the one may, in some Cases, be unfuitable, and the other irregular and excessive.

The several Goods of Life were intended not indifferently for all Purposes, or for the Use of all Persons alike; but for certain particular Ends, and for the Service of particular Men: And therefore, as often as Men err in these respects,—either pursue them without regard to the proper Design of them, or forget to whom they may be of real Service; it is no Wonder if Men fail of that Proportion of Happiness they were intended to produce.

It may be observed farther, that as this World was not intended to be the sole Place
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S E R M O N XVII. 485

of our Abode, but only as a Passage to a better and more enduring Life ; so these Goods themselves, and the use we make of them, ought to be referred to some higher and more important End : They should be considered by us, either as the Means and Instruments of Religion, — or, at least, as the Supports which Providence hath afforded us, whilst we are passing through this first Stage of our Existence to another. If therefore Men mistake this Point, and expect from them what they were never intended to produce ; — if they rest their whole Happiness on that, which was designed only to help them forward in their Way to it ; — or, which is worse, if they employ these Goods contrary to the very End and Design of them ; — then will they prove *Vanity* indeed : They will disappoint all their Expectations ; and destroy their Happiness in this Life, as well as ruin their best Hopes in a future.

II. The Doctrine thus limited I shall now endeavour to illustrate and confirm ; and, as I have hinted at Two Cases in which the Goods of Life are more especially to be reckoned *Vanity*, so I shall direct my Reflections to these Cases in particular.

486 S E R M O N XVII.

And, First, the Goods of Life must be Vanity, when pursued or enjoyed in Opposition to Religion ;-----because, on this Foot, they must be inconsistent with another much greater Good capable of being obtained by us. Supposing then, that by irregular Pursuits, or undue Management, some present Satisfaction might arise ; yet what is this, when compared with the Loss of our greatest and most substantial Happiness ? What is a Moment's Gratification in this Life, when set against an endless Pleasure forfeited, and punished by an endless Misery ?

But present Pleasure, it will be said, is *Pleasure* : Men feel it, and are in fact governed by it ; and this is a much better Argument of its being real, than any subtle Objections can prove to the contrary.

Be it so : We do not deny Pleasure to be such ; nor ought we to question that Influence which Experience shews it hath over the greatest Part of Mankind : Yet, doth this prove, that such Pleasure deserves to be compared with those other Enjoyments, which Religion alone can procure ; — or to be set against those Miseries, which Religion alone can prevent ? Doth this shew, that the Influence which vicious Pleasure hath, is a rational Influence ;

S E R M O N XVII. 487

Influence ; — such a one as Mens After-reflection can approve ? If not, then whatever Allowances may be made, either for the Greatness of this Pleasure, or its Powerfulness over the Minds of Men, we must, upon the whole, esteem it Vanity, as disappointing Mankind of something more valuable and important, and exposing them to Difficulties unsurmountable.

But perhaps these Gratifications themselves are not near so great as before-hand we are apt to imagine : And if Men have any Sense of moral Good or Ill, the Consciousness of having violated the Laws of their Nature, must abate the Relish of them ; or, if they entertain any serious Belief of a future Account, a Regret for having neglected their supreme Interests, and an Apprehension of having exposed themselves to extreme Misery, must destroy the very Pleasure they have been pursuing ; or, if an Hurry of Thought, and Tumult of Passion, should, for some time, prevent these Reflections, yet they will return in Mens sober Hours ; and the Anguish and Terror from thence arising, will be an Overbalance for any criminal Enjoyment whatsoever.

To carry the Matter farther : We will suppose

488 S E R M O N XVII.

pose (though I hope there are not many Cases in which it ought to be supposed);---we will suppose however, that Men have no Belief or Apprehension of a future Account; and are so void of a moral Taste, as to make no Difference in Actions: We will suppose them, as, on the one hand, to be free from all Regret for having acted ill; so, on the other, to be insensible of any Satisfaction from the Consciousness of a worthy Deed: Yet, notwithstanding all this, I will venture to affirm, that a vicious Course, even in such Persons as these, must render the Goods of this World useless, and Life itself insipid.

For, what is it which prompts Men to break through the Rules of Virtue? Is it not strong Passion? --- which, where-ever it prevails, must create Uneasiness; and, whilst it renders a Man incapable of properly enjoying himself; it must likewise unfit him for receiving just Satisfaction from the Enjoyments of any other kind. The eager Desire of what Men have in View;---the Anxiety of the Pursuit;---the Apprehension of a Disappointment; --- the Solicitude which they feel in the Possession, with those new Desires of more, which will ever follow; --- must prey upon, and as it were eat out, the Mind; and render those things

S E R M O N X V I I . 489

things in a great Degree useless, which they could not content themselves to labour after, or to possess, without a Crime.

Add to this, that where a Man is under no religious or moral Restraints, he is open not merely to this or that particular Passion, but to all;----to every irregular Motion, to which his own bad Temper shall dispose him, or which outward Accidents or Temptations may excite: And these are not only various, but often unfriendly and hostile to each other. Now what Satisfaction can be enjoyed, whilst a Man is miserably divided even within himself?

However, though it should be allowed, that a Violation of the plain Rules of Religion must destroy the Happiness of Life, as producing more Uneasiness, upon the whole, than any Advantages of this World can balance;----yet, still, it may be thought, that as these things are in their own Nature good, they must produce some sort of Happiness independently of any thing else. It may, notwithstanding, be maintained, that every thing in this World is *vain*, whilst pursued or possessed independently of Religion. And this will appear from recollecting, that, by resting our Happiness on this World alone,

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490 S E R M O N X V I I .

our Pursuits will be vain, if successful ;—
but attended with high Vexation, upon a
Disappointment.

We should always remember the vast Difference which Nature hath made between Men and Beasts : These latter, being designed for this World only, have a Constitution suitable to this Design : Their Organs of Sensation are, in many respects, more nice than ours ; upon which Account their sensual Enjoyments may be more exquisite : In the Pursuit of their several Desires, they follow Nature more exactly ;—I might say, in some Sense, more discreetly, than Men are apt to do : They seldom run into Excesses ;—stop when their natural Cravings are satisfied ;—do nothing to create Desires which they had not originally ; or to heighten those which are born with them : Having little Reflection, they seldom recollect what is past ; and having no Prospect, they escape all the Pain of foreboding Apprehensions. To such as these, the present World (because it is their All) is rendered more valuable : But, as the Intention of our Creator in regard to Man is extremely different, his Constitution, we might expect, should be different likewise ;—neither fitted to receive equal Pleasure with
Brutes,

S E R M O N XVII. 491

Brutes,---nor to enjoy what he shall receive without great Mixture and Allay.

In consequence of this, external Objects have a less agreeable Effect on his Senses : His Enjoyment of them is oftener interrupted by Pain of one sort or other : Being governed, in a great measure, by Humour, he is apt to pursue wrong Objects ; or, if he happens to fix on such as are agreeable, he indulges himself too far : His best Enjoyments are much qualified by the Actings of several internal Principles ;---such as are, the Sense of *Dignity*, which will not fail to reproach him for acting beneath himself ; and the Apprehension of bad Consequences,---which, heightened by a lively Imagination, will pall his Taste, if it should not quite destroy his Pleasure. What then is the mighty Gain which Success brings that Person, who, building his Happiness on the Enjoyments of this Life, falls short even of the Beasts ;---is less entertained, and more disquieted ; and ashamed of his own Conduct upon every Reflection, that in pursuing these Pleasures entirely, he is a Reproach even to himself ?

If it should be said, that sensual Pleasure is not the Aim of those who build their Happiness on this World ;----that Enjoyments of
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492 S E R M O N XVII.

this kind are allowed to be the meanest,--- since in these even Brutes may exceed us ;--- that Wealth, Power, Dignity, Fame (all which have a Reference to this World), are the Source of manly Entertainments,----and will produce a Satisfaction more pure and rational than can arise from the mere Pleasures of Sense ;----if this be said, it may be proper to examine, how far real Happiness can be founded in, or promoted by, the Acquisition of these Advantages.

It is remarkable, that the Good aimed at by them is all fanciful and imaginary, any farther than they are considered as the Means to procure some other more solid and substantial Goods. Thus : What is a Man really the better for holding a Property beyond what is necessary to supply his Wants, and to furnish out Conveniencies ? What doth it signify to his personal Happiness, that he enjoys a Power, which, being employed wrong, may render Millions wretched ? How is his own real Worth increased by the Station he may be advanced to, and the consequent Addresses and Flatteries of the Multitude ? And, lastly, what doth it signify to the Purposes of any rational Satisfaction, that he is praised by those who are no Judges of Merit, whilst he
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S E R M O N XVII. 493

is perhaps secretly despised by those who are so? And yet this is all which directly flows from the Advantages now mentioned.

In another View, indeed, they may seem to carry with them something farther: They may all of them be considered as so much Power lodged in our Hands of procuring several other Advantages we desire;—and of enjoying them when, and as often as, we please: But then the Importance of them, in this respect, will arise from the real Value of the Things they enable us to procure; which, if low, unsatisfactory, and upon Enjoyment sometimes disgustful, the Power of obtaining them must be so far vain: For, as the Consciousness of this Power is of itself of little Moment, so the best worldly Consequences arising from it are trifling.

And of this we shall be the more easily satisfied, by observing, that the past Enjoyments of this Life give us little Pleasure on the Reflection. These having tried, as the Wise Man had done, we are conscious of their little Worth; and if our Experience had reached as far as his did, we should be led, as he was, immediately to determine, that *All is Vanity*.

Thus far I have considered the Emptiness
of

494 S E R M O N XVII.

of worldly Pursuits even in Success : But, if this be true, what may we conclude the Effect must be in Case of Disappointment ? It may seem indeed, at first Sight, little ; because the real Loss, by Disappointment, is proportionable to the Gain which Success might have procured to us. And, in truth, this would prove the Case, if right Estimates of Things were made beforehand : For then we should reckon we lost nothing by Disappointment, which Success could not have obtained in Fact. But, whilst we set our Hearts upon the World, we ascribe to it a Value which doth not properly belong to it ; and, consequently, when defeated in our Pursuits, we suffer as much in our Minds as we could have done, had the Things pursued been truly valuable. From hence must arise great Uneasiness and Regret. The disappointed Desires are sometimes heightened by the Defeat ; and the Apprehension, that we may never have the Opportunity of gratifying them more,----or may be again disappointed, when just within the Reach of the Thing desired, will increase the Uneasiness, and improve it into thorough Vexation ; and perhaps make Men as much out of Humour with themselves, as with every thing else about them.

I shall

S E R M O N XVII. 495

I shall now apply the Whole to its proper Purposes, in some useful Conclusions.

And, First, We should learn from hence to withdraw our Affections from the Things of this Life: They are of themselves of too little Moment to deserve any intense Desire: The Strength of our Affections should be reserved for Things of another kind;---for those which, being obtained, cannot fail of making us truly happy;---or, being lost, must as certainly make us miserable. To these indeed we make even the World itself subservient; because we may not only enjoy the Goods we possess with Innocence, but turn them even to the best Account.

I do not say, therefore, that the Goods of Life should be rejected by us, when they come fairly in our Way: Such a Behaviour would be an unsuitable Return for the Divine Goodness, which, in the Course of Providence, makes us, as it were, the Offer. I do not say, we are obliged to maintain such an Indifferency towards them, as to be entirely unconcerned, whether we obtain them or not; for our animal Wants must, in some degree, be supplied; and, if this World should be considered as only our First Stage of Existence, yet, even as such, it will require some
suitable

496 S E R M O N XVII.

suitable Provision to be made for it. Some Attention therefore may, and ought to be given to worldly Objects; but the Point I would enforce is perfectly consistent with such Attention: It restrains our Love of the World no farther than the real Importance of the World demands: It directs us to moderate our Desires, and to keep them under Command;—to pursue the Things of Life without Solitude;—to use no unjustifiable Measures in the Pursuit; and, if we succeed, to keep ourselves so detached, as to be able to part with them (if God sees fit) without Murmur.

We should learn, in the next place, from the Doctrine before advanced, to bear Disappointments, of whatever sort they be, with Temper. The foregoing Inference was pointed against the setting our Affections too much on worldly Objects. If that Instruction be well learnt, and duly practised, the Point now mentioned may be thought to arise of course; because such as is our Regard to the Things which we pursue, will be our Uneasiness on a Disappointment.

I will carry this a little farther. We like Things present, if we find them valuable; and we wish for Things future, because we suppose

suppose a Value in them. Let us ask ourselves therefore these Questions: Whether *real* and imputed Value are always the same? As often as we have succeeded, have we found them so? Hath it not proved, in fact, that no worldly Enjoyments answer our preconceived Opinions? Why then should we suppose, there is any greater Value in the Things we miss, than we have already found in those we have obtained? Had we been disappointed in any of those former Pursuits which have succeeded, we should probably have thought the Misfortune great; yet our Success hath convinced us of such Folly. Even in these very Instances we have been disappointed; because, though we have obtained the Object of our Pursuit, yet we have missed the Satisfaction, which that Object promised us whilst in View. Success then disappoints us; and what, I pray, can the Want of Success do more?

There is another important Observation to be made on the foregoing Doctrine; *viz.* We ought not to become vain or insolent on the Possession of any worldly Advantages: It hath been seen of what small Moment they are, and how little they deserve even our Wishes. Surely that which is scarce desirable whilst

498 S E R M O N XVII.

absent, if present, can be no Ground of Pride.

I speak not here with reference to the several Distinctions which the different Ranks in Life make necessary: These must be attended to for the sake of common Order and Government: But what I mean, is this; No Man should think himself really the more valuable on account of some little Advantages which he enjoys; — Things on which he himself scarce knows how to set a Value; and which, however important they may possibly be thought for the present, can add nothing to his own real inward Character. Modesty therefore is not the peculiar Duty of the *Mean*; for it is equally proper and necessary even in the *Great*.

I shall offer One Conclusion more from what hath been said: We should from hence endeavour to fix our Thoughts more closely on another better State of Things. It hath been observed already, that we ought to withdraw our Affections from this World: But to what more proper Object should we transfer them? The Philosopher will say, To *Truth*. Yet this Question will recur; What doth he mean by *Truth*? Doth he intend mere Matters of Speculation? — Things which are in

S E R M O N XVII. 499

no way interesting?---Things, the Ignorance of which can never hurt us, and the Knowledge of which, though they please us in the Discovery, yet can never be employed to any great or lasting Advantage? Speculations of this kind are capable of being carried on by few, and necessary to be carried on by none. There is therefore some better and more general Employment in which the Mind may, and ought to, engage itself. What then may this Employment be? The more reasonable Philosopher will answer truly, and say, The proper Object of the Mind is *Wisdom*; or that which is not merely speculative, but practical. This will carry us on farther; for, as Wisdom consists in the Choice of a proper End, and the pursuing this End by proper Means,—what End so noble as the supreme Happiness of Man? — And what Mean so suitable as that Virtue, which will assuredly conduct us to it?

At present I am concerned only to note the End; which we cannot pursue regularly without keeping it constantly in View, and engaging ourselves to it with our closest and most strict Attention. And can there be any Difficulty in this? Will not the Pleasure of the Prospect reward the Pain, if there be

500 S E R M O N XVII.

any Pain in keeping up such a strict Attention? To this, one might think, we should be naturally led, from considering the Vanity of every other Object: To this we should resort, as to our Refuge from the uneasy Reflections which the Emptiness of Success, and the Trouble of Disappointment, would otherwise suggest. Surely we have, or may have, seen enough of Life to make us indifferent about it, if not in some measure weary of it. And when a better World is opening to us, can we have so little Curiosity, as not to take a View; or so little Concern for ourselves, as not to pursue a Contemplation so delightful, even at present.

It is enough to suggest these Things: The Good and Serious will consider them; and those, otherwise disposed, cannot be wrought on by any kind of Arguments: We can only shew them their Happiness; which, if they attend to, they must pursue: But, if the Evil Being hath blinded them, or they have blinded themselves, no good Effects can follow: What they have sown in Vanity, they will most assuredly reap in Torment.

Now to God the Father, God the Son,
Ecce Amen.

T H E

THE
BISHOP of BRISTOL's
Charge to his CLERGY,

Delivered at his Primary Visitation,
 in the Month of JULY, 1752.

My Reverend and Dear Brethren,

ON this my First meeting you assembled in such a public Manner, I should be wanting to myself, as well as to you; if I did not recollect that most excellent Person my Predecessor in this See; whose Merits occasioned his Removal to a larger Scene of Action, where, had it pleased God to prolong his Life, his Piety, his Charity, his Generosity, his Wisdom, and his

502 *The Bishop of Bristol's*

Abilities of every kind, might have shewn themselves to greater Advantage.

For several Years you have had the Happiness of living under the Influence of these great Qualities, and of reaping the Advantage of it, if instructed by his Wisdom, restrained by his Authority, and animated by his Example, you have profited, in any tolerable Degree, under that Blessing which the good Providence of God hath given you.

I flatter myself I shall discern the Fruits of this most excellent Person's Inspection and Government, shewing themselves in the good Order and exemplary Conduct of the Clergy he hath delivered over to me ; who will want nothing to be done on my Part, but to exhort them to continue in the same good Way in which he hath already put them ;---to remember his Instructions ;---to keep his Manner of Life amongst you in Mind ;---and to be constantly pressing forward in the Road of Christian Duty and Honour.

This Circumstance of my Diocese suggests to me, as the most proper Subject of our present Meditations, the Concern we have to persevere in every good Work ;---attentively to consider the Nature and Dignity of our Office ;---the Duties which are incumbent
on

on us on account of this Office ;----and the strong Motives faithfully to discharge these Duties. By duly reflecting on this great Subject, the good Pastor will be animated, will be supported, will be comforted : He will be urged on to prosecute the great Work before him : If Difficulties shall arise (as the Condition of the World will frequently throw Difficulties in his Way), he will from hence be fortified against them : And if, upon Recollection, his Conscience shall bear Testimony that he hath acted well, he will reap such Satisfaction for the present, and enjoy such comfortable Assurances of Divine Favour for the future, as will amply reward all the Labours and Difficulties he hath passed through.

Let me desire you therefore, my dear Brethren, to recollect with me (for I am as much concerned in this Recollection as you yourselves are) the Nature and Dignity of our Office.

As to the general Nature of our Office, it consists in this ; That we are appointed by Christ to minister to the People in sacred Things : And the End of this Ministration is, to promote, as far as we are able, the Glory of God, and the supreme Interests of Man.

504 *The Bishop of Bristol's*

So far as this we are all of us equally concerned, whatever may be our different Ranks and Stations : We are all of us Officers appointed by the same Lord, and for the same general Purposes.

This Point will more distinctly appear, if we consider under what Figures the Office, which we sustain, is represented in Scripture. These are very affecting, and will serve at once both to instruct and move us.

We are *Ministers* indeed ; but not in the low Sense in which the Word is sometimes used ; for we are the Ministers of Christ [*Rom. x. 16.*] We do his Work, who came not so much *to be ministered unto, as to minister* [*Mat. xx. 28.*]—to shew Men their spiritual Wants, — to relieve these Wants, —and to bring them once more into a State of Favour with that God whom they had offended. Hence Christ is said to reconcile us to God : His Ministry was the Ministry of Reconciliation : And we also, as acting under Christ in the Prosecution of this Work, are honoured with the same kind of Title [*2 Cor. v. 19.*]

See ! how we are still farther dignified, whilst we are represented in Scripture, not barely as the Servants of Christ, in execut-
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ing his Commands for the Interests of Mankind, but as *Fellow-Workers* and Labourers with him [2 Cor. vi. 1.]. Not that we are to imagine we hold the same Rank, and contribute to this great End in the same Proportion, with him; [to say this were Blasphemy:] — But thus much may be concluded from hence, that we are considered as concurrent, in some measure, with our Blessed Lord himself; who, acting as our *High Priest*, admits us to officiate as Priests likewise, though of an inferior Order.

We are *spiritual Watchmen*; Persons appointed by Christ to the perpetual Care of his Subjects; — to look after their sacred Interests with Attention and Diligence; — to foresee Dangers in order to guard against them; — and to promote, in every Way which such Attention can point out to us, their eternal Salvation: An Office this, not only of Importance, but Dignity; — as bearing some sort of Analogy to the Regal Power itself, which is never more properly, or indeed more nobly, exercised, than in providing for the People's general Interest, and treating it as superior even to that which is personally their own.

We are *Pastors*, engaged in an Employment

ment similar to that, which, in the earlier and more simple Ages, was in the highest Credit ; for *then* Persons of the best Rank superintended their Flocks, in which their chief Treasure consisted : They cherished the Weak ; they reduced the Straying ; they directed them to proper Pastures ; and guarded against the several Dangers to which they might, in any respect, be exposed. It may deserve our Attention, that antient Writers, both Sacred and Civil, have represented even the Supreme Authority by Figures alluding to the Pastoral ; by which Representation they have at once explained that Authority itself, and dignified the Office from which this figurative Representation was drawn.

To go a little higher : We are *Stewards*, Superintendents of Christ's Family, and Dispensers to them of his sacred and most valuable Treasures : To us it belongs to impart his Instructions, and to dispense his Blessings ; to feed Men with the Food of Life,—and to prepare and dispose them for the Reception of their Blessed Lord, when he shall come to reward every Man according to his Works.

Lastly : We are *the Ambassadors of Christ* ; sent by our Blessed Lord, out of infinite
Grace

Charge to his Clergy. 507

Grace to Mankind, to explain to them his benevolent Purposes,---to urge them to accept his Offers,---and to receive to a State of Reconciliation such as are willing to return to Duty. The Title here given us, is a Confirmation of every Right, which we properly confer in the Name of Christ; and therefore must require the utmost Solitude and Care that we exercise this Power justly, to the Honour of God, and the Benefit of his Church.

Upon the figurative Representations now produced, I shall offer such Reflections as do most naturally arise from them.

And, First, we may observe to what an honourable State it hath pleased God to call us; for each of these Representations carries with it a particular Relation to our Blessed Lord himself, by whom we are appointed, not to a lower and less material Service, but to that in which he himself is most deeply interested, and in which he himself bears the greatest Share. If we are *Ministers*, we are *the Ministers of Christ*:---If we are *Labourers*, we are *Workers together with him*:---If we are appointed to *watch*, it is for the *Souls of those for whom he died*:---If we are *Pastors*, we are *Pastors of his Flock*;---of that
Flock,

508 *The Bishop of Bristol's*

Flock, of which he himself is the *chief Shepherd*;---which he directs, and feeds, and defends, *inwardly*, by his Grace; and *outwardly*, by us his ordinary and visible Instruments:---If we are *Stewards*, he is our Lord, to whom we are accountable for this our most important Trust: And if, Lastly, we are *Ambassadors*, we have our Commission from the highest and most venerable Power,---from that which governs all things both in Heaven and in Earth. The Use of this Reflection should be, not to flatter our Vanity, nor to induce us to exalt ourselves improperly, but to consider, that the higher our Character, and the more important our Office, the more severe Account must we give of our discharging it.

We may observe, Secondly, from what hath been produced, how greatly momentous the End is for which our Office was appointed.

With respect to God, it points at the Promotion of his Honour, and the Restoration of that Influence which his Authority ought to have over Mankind: Not that we can withdraw ourselves from his Power: This will for ever maintain itself, and be glorified, if not by our Salvation, yet at least by our Destruction.

Charge to his Clergy. 509

Destruction. But what I here mean is this ; The infinitely good Being, who created us for Happiness, hath from the Beginning appointed that an Obedience to his Will shall be the Means of it. From this Obedience Mankind was seduced ; and it was the Design of the Christian Institution to restore them ; to restore them, not to Favour *absolutely*, but by a Renewal of Obedience ; in this Way putting themselves again under the Divine Influence, and reviving his moral and religious Government over them : We are employed as Instruments for this Purpose : It is our Glory to be so, as, by duly pursuing it, we shall find it our supreme Interest.

With respect to Mankind, the End of our Office (the last End, I mean) is the Salvation of those committed to our Charge ; and the more immediate End, the preparing them for this Salvation by a Life of Virtue and Religion. If the former be worth Mens utmost Pains, the latter must likewise be so : For such as our last End is, such likewise must the Means be, which are necessary for attaining it. That Improvement in Religion therefore, which every-one is so much concerned to make, it must be equally our Concern to promote.

We

510 *The Bishop of Bristol's*

We may observe, Thirdly, That the several Representations before produced, intimate to us very strongly the Nature and Properties of that Duty which belongs to our Office. It will not be improper to review these Representations, though I have offered some Remarks on them already; because they are now alledged for another Purpose, and shall be set in a different Light.

When we consider that we are *Ministers*, we should learn, at the same time, that we are such, not only with respect to Christ who employs us, but to those Persons likewise to whom we are to minister in sacred Things: And this should remind us with what Humility we should succour the Infirmities of those we desire to serve: No Persons, however low their Station may be, should be neglected by us; and no Offices, whereby we may serve them in their spiritual Concerns, omitted.

The being *Labourers together with Christ*, should inspire us with a Zeal answerable to the Importance of the Work we are about, and the Dignity of our Fellow-worker: We should consider, that the great Scheme of our Redemption was projected by our Blessed Lord himself; that the most painful Part of
it

Charge to his Clergy. 511

it was executed by himself in Person ; and that he is not only our Inspector, whilst we are now acting under him, but concurrent likewise with us in every Step we take. How should this animate our Endeavours, and invigorate our Hopes, and support us under every Difficulty we may meet with !

Since we are set as *Watchmen* over the spiritual Affairs of Men, we should learn Attention, Diligence, and perpetual Care, that no Advantages we can suggest to them may be lost, and that no Dangers we can guard them against may be neglected. To be heedless therefore, or indolent, or careless, under such a Circumstance, must be unpardonable : For whilst it is directly contrary to the very Character we sustain, it exposes the Persons, for whom we ought to watch, to Difficulties insuperable.

Since we are *Pastors*, we are to assist, to direct, to feed [that is, to instruct], the Flock committed to our Charge ; and to defend them, as well as we are able, against all their spiritual Enemies. He who declines to do this, is not a proper Pastor, but, in our Saviour's Account, an *Hireling* ; who, undertaking the Care of the Flock for Gain, doth nothing which the good Pastor would do : In

some respects, he may prove worse; for if, instead of salutary Direction, he shall mislead them; and occasion their falling either into Errors as to Doctrine, or into Viciousness of Life, he is the worst Enemy they can meet with: As his Crime is great, most horrible will be his Punishment.

Since we are *Stewards of the Mysteries* of God, of the sacred Treasure committed to us; we should be *faithful* to this our Trust, and dispense the Divine Favours, in every respect, as God requires us to dispense them: We should neither with-hold this Treasure where it may reasonably be distributed, nor prostitute it by an improper Distribution: The one is an Injury to the Person defrauded; and the other, a Disgrace to the Office unduly exercised.

Once more: Since we are *the Ambassadors of Christ*, we should remember in whose Name we act, and for what Purpose we are sent: We should maintain the Dignity of the Character we assume; not by Insolence, but by following the Dictates of that true Wisdom, which will always shew us how to act: We should keep it perpetually in Mind, that whilst, as Ambassadors, we declare to Men the kind Purpose of our Redeemer, we should
apply

Charge to his Clergy. 513

apply to them in every proper Way: And as our Blessed Lord desires Men to be reconciled to him, we should labour, to the utmost of our Power, to reclaim them; representing at once the infinite Advantage of this Reconciliation, and the dreadful Consequence of refusing it; laying hold of every favourable Opportunity of influencing their Minds,--of disposing them,--of urging them on,--and of fixing them, till the whole End of our Embassy is obtained, and till, having successfully executed our Commission, we receive the Reward of it.

I must not dismiss this Head without offering One Consideration farther; and this results not so much from any of the foregoing Representations separately taken, as from all of them in Conjunction. In that View, what I am now to mention will come to us with a much greater Weight and Force. What I design, is this; That in order to execute any of the Duties of our Office effectually, we should recommend what we are about by our own virtuous and pious Deportment.

That Relation to Christ, which the several Characters we sustain import, certainly requires, not only that we be innocent, but exemplary; a Sanctity of Manners suitable

to our Situation, and expressive of the Perfections of that God whom we serve: On any other Foot than this, we must be so far from doing Credit to our Place, that we disgrace it: For what a Representative must he be of an All-righteous Master, who forgets the very Master he represents;---who, in his own Person, is the very Reverse of the Character he would recommend; and who contradicts, in his own Conduct, the very Commission by which he acts?

Let us consider the Nature and End of our Office: It is designed (as I have already said) for the Promotion of Righteousness; and, in consequence of this, the Attainment of Salvation by all those to whom we minister: And the Manner in which our Office should be exercised in order to this End, is, by Instruction, by Exhortation, by Reproof, and by such other Ways, as the particular Occasions of Mankind require: But can any of these Methods be exercised with Effect, where the Life of the Pastor shall contradict his very Design?

It will not be sufficient for him to say, "You must live as I teach, without regard to any thing you may see me practise." This Suggestion, however right in itself, will be
to

Charge to his Clergy. 515

to no Purpose: For Men are taught more by Example than by Precept: And when they see their Teacher act in Contradiction to his Doctrine, they will be apt to suspect, that he himself disbelieves the very Doctrine which he delivers: Reason indeed should prevail, where Men are capable of understanding Reason: But this may be misapplied, as we often find it is so: And many Men will be apt to think, that they have greater Reason to credit what we do, than what we say.—
Forgive me, my dear Brethren, if I express myself with some sort of Warmth here;—not as suspecting that any to whom I am now addressing want to be restrained; I hope better Things of you, though I thus speak: But the Weak (if any such there be) may be strengthened; and the Strong (as I hope you all are) may be confirmed. What I would therefore add, is this; That as the good Life of a Clergyman is a perpetual Lecture, and will recommend every thing he teaches by a living Image of the Virtue he inculcates, so his bad Life will do Ten times more Mischief than all his good Teaching can repair: It will probably ruin many of those Souls committed to his Care; but it will most assuredly bring a double Destruction upon himself.

I shall pass on from hence to consider some of the Motives we have faithfully to perform our Duties; and, in handling these, I shall have a particular Eye to the Nature of our Office, as set forth to us by the figurative Representations before produced.

Indeed several Things have been already suggested to this Purpose, whilst I have been speaking of the Nature and Duties of our Office: And, in truth, it is no easy Matter to treat any Subject so distinctly, that one Part shall not run into another. However, I have reserved the principal Consideration of these Motives to the present Head.

Let us consider therefore, in the First place, that to discharge the several Duties of our Office faithfully, is in itself fitting and proper, and suitable to the sacred Character which we assume. As to the common Duties of Virtue and Religion, in which all Men are concerned, these are either founded in the Reasons of Things,—or some few of them resolvable into the Supreme Will of God: But even here Obedience likewise is a natural Duty, because a Representation of our natural Dependence. The same holds in reference to those Duties which result from the different Relations, in which we stand either

to God or to Mankind : For these likewise must be in themselves fitting, as being naturally expressive of such Relations : And therefore it must be in itself highly proper, that since we have undertaken the sacred Care of Souls, we should pursue this Work with the utmost Zeal and Diligence : To act otherwise is absurd ; because unsuitable to the Place we are in, and the Engagements we have entered upon.

Perhaps Arguments of this kind may not have their full Force on every-one ; on those at least who reflect little, and whose moral Taste is less delicate : But to Persons in our Profession, — whose Education hath been learned and ingenuous, and who have been all along trained up to Virtue, one may expect they should have a proper Influence : The Modesty, which generally attends such good Beginnings, will make us ashamed of acting such a Part as shall render us justly contemptible in the Sight of others, and especially of ourselves.

We may go on farther, and consider, that since the Office to which we have been called, is in itself so honourable, and in its Ends so important, we are concerned to fulfil it, out of Gratitude to that Being, by whom we

have been thus singularly distinguished: We naturally fall into this Way of Thinking on every similar Occasion: If a Prince shall advance some particular Subjects to Rank and Station, and commit his most valuable Concerns to their Care, with all the Circumstances of Grace, we immediately consider them as most deeply indebted for these Favours, and concerned in no Respects to impair his Interests by their Negligence, much less to betray them by their Unfaithfulness: Or, to descend lower, if the Master of a larger Family, entertaining a good Opinion of a Servant, shall chuse him to some more creditable Service, in which he may at once, to a higher Degree, please his Master, oblige his Dependents, and advantage himself, how should we censure, and even abhor, such a Servant, if, upon Trial, he be found to disappoint his Master's Expectations? Let us think therefore (and a very little Attention will surely give Weight to the Reflection) how base and unworthy it must be in us, by deserting our honourable Post, to affront our gracious Lord, who placed us in it; and how absurd likewise, by sacrificing his Interests, to give up our own.

I am led from hence to some other Considerations; which, if the former shall affect

us in some measure, will carry us on farther, and animate us in the Prosecution of our great Work in hand.

To this purpose let us consider, that by acting a worthy Part, suitably to our Office, we shall recommend ourselves to the good Opinion of Mankind; we shall procure their Reverence, and even their Affection; and this will give Weight and Credit to us upon every Occasion which offers. A good Man, in any Station, is, and must be, the Object of Regard: But a good Man, acting in such Circumstances as shall set his Goodness in an advantageous Light, and render it a general Benefit to the World, is a Character still more amiable: Such a Man will be esteemed, notwithstanding either the Malice or Folly of a few Detractors, whose own Want of that Merit they would depreciate, will disappoint the Effects both of their Malice and their Folly: Or, if Difficulties should sometimes be brought upon us by such ill-judging Persons, we have no Reason to be discouraged: We shall still retain the Good-will and Esteem of the Deserving; and this, at the same time that it should comfort us, will prove likewise our Defence: In some short Time at least we shall get the better;---per-

haps make our very Enemies our Converts ; ---and improve our Credit by the Assistance of those very Persons, who had attempted to destroy it.

I shall add One Motive farther, which I have reserved to this Place, because it is of all the most affecting ; I mean, that the faithful Discharge of the several Duties of our Station is our supreme Interest, and will recommend us to the particular Favour of the Almighty. *They that be wise, shall shine as the Brightness of the Firmament ; and they that turn many to Righteousness, as the Stars for ever and ever [Dan. xii. 3.]* Indeed every good Man is secure of the Divine Favour, and shall be distinguished hereafter in proportion as he hath acted in this Life, and fitted himself to support such a Distinction : But the Case of a good Clergyman is somewhat different from that of others : His Course of Life is attended with greater Difficulties, which require a superior Labour to overcome them : For he is to labour, not only for himself, but others ;—solicitous to save, not barely his own Soul, but that of each Person committed to his Charge : If he goes on to do this with Care, and Zeal, and Resolution ; and especially, if, in consequence
of

of such a Vigour, he shall succeed, the very Thought of having succeeded will become Matter of Triumph; and, when he comes to enter on his Reward, will, by a kind of natural Efficacy, heighten this very Reward itself. How must he rejoice, when he appears to make up his great Account, that he is able to say, looking round on those saved by his Assistance, These are they whom I have converted from the Error of their Ways;—or, being converted, have strengthened;—or, being strengthened, have perfected! The mutual Congratulations both of Pastor and People, after having thus finished their Course, must heighten the Satisfaction of each: The Happiness of the one will become the Happiness of the other: They will go on for ever rejoicing, and improving by each other's Joy: Or, if it should happen, through the Perverseness of any of our People, that we miss the Success wished for, yet the Conscientiousness of having done our best will enable us to look up with Comfort: The Events of Things not being at our Command, our most gracious Master will rather consider what we have resolutely endeavoured, than what we have successfully performed: We shall even in this Case find, that our Labours have not
been

been in vain ;---but, though we may possibly have lost some of our People, yet we have effectually saved ourselves.

On the other hand, let us consider (for it is of infinite Consequence to do so) what must be our Conditon, if, notwithstanding these Motives, we neglect to perform the Duties which belong to us : Then we shall forfeit all the Advantages which were graciously put into our Hands : We shall render ourselves contemptible both to ourselves and to our People : For, we may be assured, no Man can derive Credit from his Station, who will not, on his own Part, endeavour to do Credit to it : And though, possibly, by a Perversion of Law, he may sometimes bid Defiance to his spiritual Governors, and escape the proper Effect of their Censures, yet let him not think all is well ; God will still look on him with Contempt and Aversion : Nor will he be able to recommend himself even to the Bad ; because, though they may use him for some time as their Tool, in accomplishing their own wicked Purposes, yet, when that Point is done, they will not fail to throw him aside, as such Tools deserve to be, with Contempt ; and so he will find, when it is too late to profit by such Experience,

that

Charge to his Clergy. 523

that he hath miserably ruined himself. And well were it for him, if all would end here ! But this cannot be : God will not be mocked, however he may have hoped to deceive and impose on Man : A severe Account is still to be made : He will find his own Soul to be lost : And yet this is not all : The very Sins of those who have been ruined by his Means, will be imputed to him ; and this terrible Circumstance, whilst it increases his Guilt, will aggravate his Condemnation.

In what hath been hitherto advanced, I have considered the Case of Clergymen, only in reference to their spiritual Character : But it must not be forgotten, that we likewise sustain several other Relations, the Obligations of which must be attended to ; and this, as for many other Reasons, so particularly, because such an Attention becomes us even in our spiritual Capacity, and will render our Labours that Way more successful.

To this purpose, since I cannot mention all Cases, I would chuse to remind you, that we are connected with Mankind, both as Descendents from the same common Parents, and as Members of the same civil Society.

On

524 *The Bishop of Bristol's*

On account of the former Connexion, we are concerned to contribute, in every Way we are able, towards the promoting Peace, and a good Understanding between Men. We are all of us *Brethren*; and therefore should act towards each other suitably to such an endearing Relation. Every Man is concerned in some measure to promote this most desirable Circumstance; but we of the Clergy more especially, as we are the *Ministers of Peace*, and Servants of that God, who is in Scripture termed *The God of Peace*. If therefore Differences are likely to arise, we should endeavour to prevent them; if arisen, we should endeavour to compose them; or, if grown to a Head, we should strive, *in Season and out of Season* (that is, whether our Success be probable or no), to reconcile Men, before it becomes too late to do so. This Work may indeed, in some Cases, be difficult: But the greater the Difficulty, the greater will be our Merit in attempting it: We shall perhaps, in most Cases, succeed; and, when we do so, shall obtain, as well as deserve, the Thanks of both the contending Parties: Or, if it should prove otherwise, yet the indifferent Spectators will approve us; — our own Consciences

Charge to *his* Clergy. 525

ences will applaud us;—and He, who is greater than our Consciences, will reward us.

I wish there were none Occasion to mention One thing (but it is too notorious to be overlooked), that a great deal of the Differences which arise, is owing to little Party Distinctions, at the best of no Consequence, but very often carried to an Height which is astonishing. These let us endeavour to prevent, or to remove; not by entering into Party ourselves, and endeavouring to give superior Weight to one Side, in order to extinguish totally the other;—but by striving to persuade Men, that all Contentions of this kind are unreasonable;—that they are, with respect to the Publick, mischievous;—and so far as the particular Interests of the Contenders are concerned, useless.

I pass on to that other Connexion we have with Mankind, as Members of the same Civil Community: And here we are not only concerned, in common with others, to support the established Government, by paying Obedience to its Laws, and maintaining the Interests of our Supreme Governor, but, even as Clergymen, we are under particular Obligations to do so: For, though we derive our
spiritual

spiritual Powers from Christ, and are so far independent on any other Authority, yet the Civil Privileges we enjoy are owing to Civil Favour. The Church can be established only by Law; and therefore the Advantages which flow from thence, must be ascribed to the same Power, which gives a Force to Law. This being the Case, our Obligations to Loyalty are extraordinary; for this in us must be the Result, not only of Reason, but of Interest. It must become us, surely, on this Account (over and above the Reasons of Conscience), to endeavour that we may stand in a fair Light with the Power which presides over us. But we are farther engaged to do so by the constant Conduct of His present Majesty, whose Zeal for the Support of the Church, is the same with that which he expresses for the Support of his own Authority. Here the Consideration of Gratitude comes in; and Loyalty may be enforced on us, as well from the Sense of what is past, as the Hope of what is yet to come. — I forbear to carry this Matter farther; for I would not willingly have it suspected, that the Clergy, — those especially to whom I am now speaking, — can need Enlargement on this Subject. I shall close my Discourse with this Request;

Charge to his Clergy. 527

quest ; That since the Matter before us is of great Importance, you would consider it attentively in your Retirements : And then, whatever hath been by me imperfectly said, will be supplied by your own pious and better Meditations.

F I N I S.



